

THE NEW AMERICAN DRAMA

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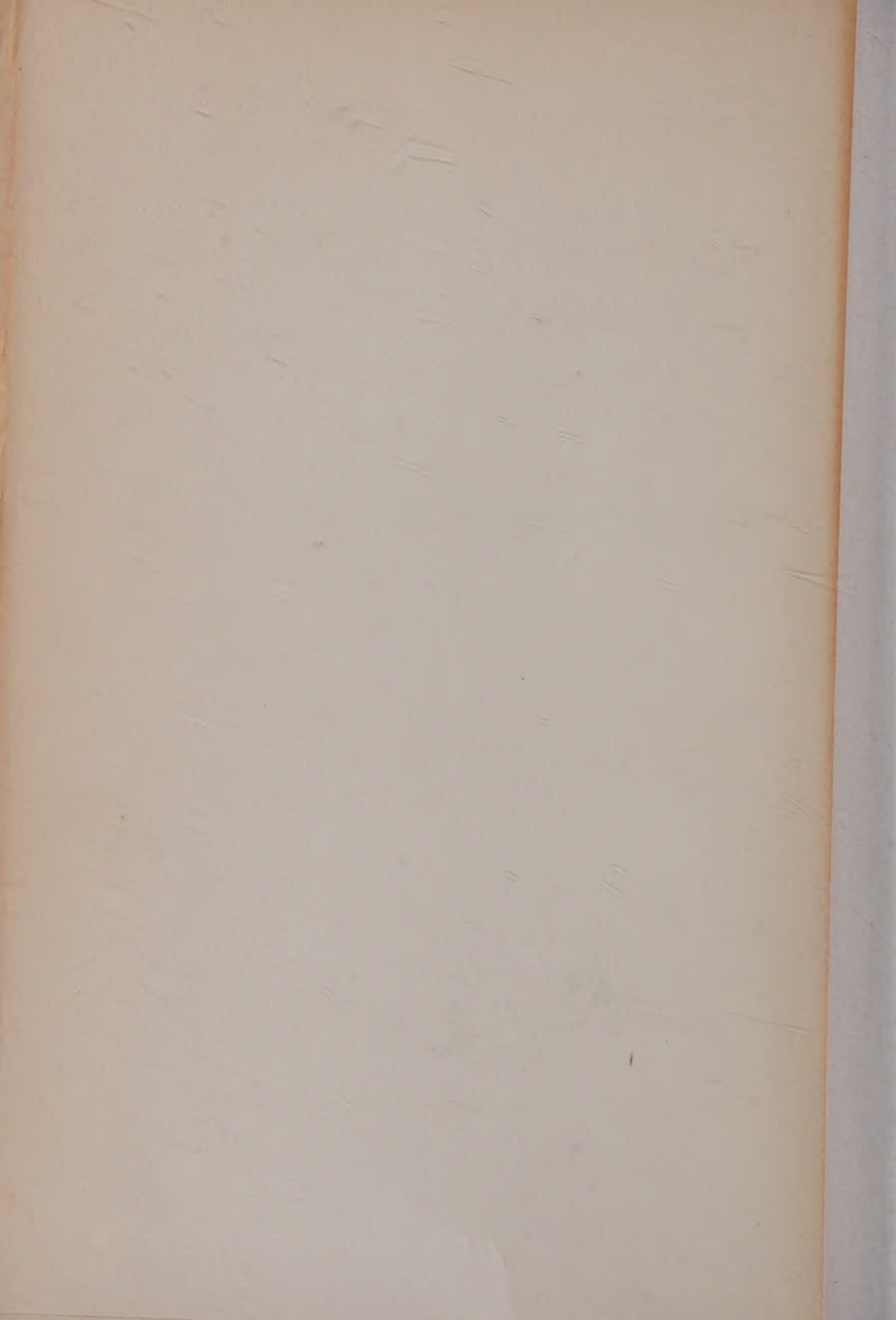
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THE NEW AMERICAN DRAMA



THE NEW AMERICAN DRAMA

BY

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For this writing of plays is a great matter, forming as it does the minds and affections of men in such sort that whatsoever they see done in show on the stage, they will presently be doing in earnest in the world, which is but a larger stage.

SHAW's Dark Lady of the Sonnets.

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THE WORD BEFORE

THIS study of present dramatic conditions is not a catalogue of plays and playwrights. It does not essay with meticulous detail to ferret out minute happenings by the analytic method. It is, rather, an attempt, let us hope not altogether amiss, to put before the reader in synthetic fashion the native movement of our time in drama, placing emphasis upon what seem significant tendencies and illustrative personalities. The writer has endeavored to draw together the main threads of development, so that a notion of what was, is and may be shall be gained. It is a more difficult task to point out concisely the essential accomplishment, than it is to set down, with the zeal of the grubber for dates, all the tiny doings from Royall Tyler to Clyde Fitch. Literary biology has its dangers; one of them is the misuse of that mod-

ern fetich, the scientific method. Lemaitre's remark that the discussion of contemporaries is not criticism, but conversation, is an epigram that touches the truth. Nevertheless, it may be possible to be helpful in a modest way even when one deals with the present and has current phenomena in mind.

If this purpose has been attained in the present volume, in a way to arouse interest and suggest an intelligent attitude, the writer will feel that his labor has not been entirely without avail. Surely, in a field so broad and until of late so little cultivated, there is room for the activities of many, critics and creative workers alike.

THE NEW AMERICAN DRAMA

I

THE UNFAILING LURE

ON a certain beautiful May morning, the present writer entered the door of a well-known publishing house on Beacon Street, Boston, upon business intent, and with scant time for its transaction before he set foot the same morning on an eastward bound ocean steamer. But he found it difficult, nay, impossible to get attention, since the whole force of the establishment from office boy to firm member had become oblivious to indoor duties, because that modern survival of the picturesque past, a circus procession, was passing that way. It seemed the part both of wisdom and pleasure to crane one's neck

from an upper window until the Barnum and Bailey Mammoth Show had ceased from troubling.

The philosopher finds food for reflection in the incident, with its curious, universal appeal, its lure unchanged since boyhood days. The Roman populace cried for bread and circuses, and perhaps bread came first in the classic sentence only for grammatical reasons; the populace is the same to-day, and within the definition of the word come all ages, conditions and kinds of men. All the world still pricks up its ears at the sound of the announcing bugle, the stir of feet along the thronged, processional way. Sir Walter Scott declared the world swung forward under the urge of two mighty passions: hunger and love. It might have been well to add a third: the imperious demand for poetry, that bright, elusive, faraway and hence desirable thing that takes us out of ourselves, coming like a beautiful bird of Paradise to make suddenly colorful the gray humdrum of our days. It is, in a word, Romance; the blue flower of

the Germans, the blue bird of Maeterlinck, Stevenson's nightingale with his "time-devouring note."

And that is what the circus gives us all. We see it through the wonder eyes of youth because we are all' young in the mood it evokes. Sated of life's feast though we may be, something of the old thrill is ours as its face, fresh, albeit familiar, confronts us; partly reminiscential perhaps but elemental, too, going deep down to the psychic depths where the imperishable boy survives, to meet us more than half way when the band begins to play.

See how those stately knights lead the glittering cavalcade! It is a touch out of Kenilworth, and the urchin by the curb side forgets for a great moment to suck his candy ball, tranced in present joy, elate at the mile-long vista of his imagination, at his heart a wild hope fluttering of a seat at the afternoon performance,—with three rings, mark you, three rings active at once and each better than the other!

Now follow the cages, hooded, bodefully suggestive of the great beasts within, whose sullen growls breed awe even in the adult breast; with an amazing central van open to human gaze, that one may see the lion tamer sitting Alexander-like among his savage minions; the poetry of the jungle linked with the poetry of man's intellectual supremacy over the animal kingdom. Next, perchance, a group of Japanese jugglers, high atop a glorious structure, knife-tossing, lithe, another exotic note that makes Main Street seem terribly drab and commonplace.

And then, elephants with monkeys on their backs, their facile trunks saluting the crowd; or a drove of camels, those sad, faithful trudgers of the desert, with their ambulatory undulations, followed hard on by a little gilded chariot wherein two painted clowns dispense grimaces and ancient jests to the huge satisfaction of a never-lacking queue of perspiring lads who, loth to run twenty yards of an errand for forgotten mothers, will yet cover unconscious miles to keep up

with those same autocrats of democratic fun.

The horses, too, how noble they are, how lovely their caparisons, how deftly controlled by the ladies and gentlemen astride their sleek backs, who look like creatures out of a medieval tale! Let your gaze go down the vista and rest on yonder towering car, built up in tiers of splendor, shining afar in the sun; and see that radiant goddess—there is no meaner word—who from her topply throne waves an enchanted sceptre and smiles a smile that reveals not the fact that she has arisen at four of the clock that very morning and lacks substantial breakfast withal to sustain her godship.

And the superbly uniformed bands, the lovely Lilliputian ponies, the trained dogs with their more than human sagacity, the acrobats in action, the minstrel band in half circle, the black faces so strikingly set forth from a background of white and gold; and then more vans, until it seems as though the line would never reach the climax of

the inevitable Calliope, fairly shouting at us its staccato melody. What marvel that business suspends, be the place large or small, and even gray beards throw caution to the winds and nodding judicious yet half-turned heads, declare that it is the best parade that ever came to town!

Yes, the appeal is perennial, neither time, culture nor repetition can quite stale its infinite zest and variety.

And the call of the circus is at bottom the call of the theatre; an institution that has always been and always will be cherished by the masses of mankind, let wiseacres prate as they may. Stripped of its higher significance, its interpretation of life, historic or present, beneath its schools and shibboleths, its triumphs, fads and fashions, is the "show," and the human hunger for it. Therefore, to seek to kill such an amusement, and stifle the institution that ministers to such an instinct, is the classic attempt to reverse the waters of the sea, in modern repetition. You may close the door of the playhouse to your child

by injunction, be sure he will break your command, or else turn to some other equivalent in the eternal quest for Romance. Hence is it the part of wisdom to recognize the need, the craving, and strive by a proper control and direction of the theatre to give it food; making the playhouse yield man what is for his welfare, and frankly realizing its unique power to perform this service under the guise of pleasure.

II

THE THEATRE AND THE PEOPLE

IT is an open secret that the theatre is universally fascinating. Its power lies in the fact that it is a place where you may hear a story told in terms of emotion as you sit with others whose society enforces your private feeling with overtones of their own. And the story comes radiating over the footlights, too, by no indirection of the printed page, but communicated by the looks, actions and words of the men and women whose fates enthrall the mind, even as their motions enthrall the eye. We not only see them as we sit like the gods apart, but we hear them as well.

When Enoch Arden returned to his native burg, he was told that Annie, his wife, believing him dead, had married his friend, Philip; that children, hers, but not his,

played at her knee. But when in the night, from the garden outside the house, he sees her at her own hearth, circled by her dear ones, then—

“because things seen are mightier than things heard,”

he steals away and falls in his agony to mother earth to wrestle with mighty sorrow. The potent influence of the theatre is admirably summed up in that one memorable line.

The drama is democratic, for one thing, because it is not necessarily literature at all; millions have enjoyed it who can neither read nor write; an effective story about life can be told without the use of a single word, as in pantomime. Yet the play can rise to the heights of imaginative expression, and becomes the greatest as well as the most difficult of literary forms; and so we get Sophocles, Shakspeare, Molière, Calderon, Ibsen.

The theatre is an amusement; herein lies its peril and its high opportunity. Its peril,

because we of Puritan descent, inheriting an unfair and unfortunate prejudice against it, are in danger of making the drama low, by thinking it is so; give a dog a bad name, says the aphorism. We forget that bit of Latin wisdom: the abuse of a thing is nothing against the thing.

But, as I said, its opportunity, too: for an amusement like the playhouse, with its splendidly general appeal, can influence the world more vitally for the very reason that it is regarded as a pleasure.

Play reveals the nature of a person or people as even work does not; it catches humanity off-guard, so to say, in a child-like mood; hence the historic saying: "Let me make the songs of the people. I care not who makes its laws." Yes, in *ludo veritas*, is truer than in *vino veritas*, it cuts deeper into the heart of man. When we say a piece of work was done sportively, in a spirit of play, we mean it was more truly self-expressive. It is this sense of boy-like creative activity which is in the mind of the

writer of Proverbs, when he imagines the spirit of Wisdom co-operating with God:

“ When He marked out the foundation of the earth,
Then I was by Him
As a master workman,
And I was daily His delight,
Sporting always before Him,
Sporting in His habitable earth,
And my delight was with the sons of men.”

The theatre roots in this deep craving for play, for sport, for joy; play is not a luxury, but a necessity. And another root, of kin to this, is the mimetic instinct. Every child, before it reaches the stage of self-consciousness, is the race writ small in the desire to act, to represent life in terms of the imagination; the child is but a little mime, a mummer masking by day and night; in this sense, we are all suppressed actors:

“ And all the men and women merely players.”

The theatre, once more, has its root in the religious instinct; the ancient Indian myth plays, the Greek altar of Dionysus, the European medieval cathedral—everywhere the history of the drama illustrates it. Wor-

ship allies itself with action, with concrete show and picture, in order to make the teaching more effective, to carry it home to the populace. We have been reminded in recent years of this elder union of religion and the stage by such plays as "Everyman," "The Servant in the House" and "The Passing of the Third Floor Back."

The church has always been aware that a stage play is regarded by an audience as a piece of life and exercises a corresponding power; it would not have tolerated the silly notion that a drama bears no relation to life and therefore is relieved from moral responsibility; the astute church knew better; indeed, all private experience gives the idea the lie. The veteran Henry Irving, when past sixty, was representing Tennyson's play, "Becket," and an admirer one night, thinking to compliment him, remarked that the actor had done much for the play. Whereupon Irving answered: "It is nothing compared with what it has done for me; it has changed my whole view of life."

If a noble play can effect such a result in the case of the player himself, after a lifetime of professional simulation, what can it not do with that impressionable creature, the average playgoer?

Here, then, is the most democratic of all story-telling, corresponding to a deep, dramatic instinct, with rootages in play, in religion, in the universal love of life, influencing untold thousands daily, millions of human beings a year; and therefore its use or abuse offering a vital, practical, educational problem in the United States.

What is being done? Do we realize what the playhouse is, and are we handling it to show such realization? Have we a government officer, national, municipal or state, to supervise the theatre? No, you reply, that were grotesque. But we have a conservator of our forests; are the souls of the people not worth as much as sticks and stones? Is there not here a sacrifice to the great God Mammon? Moreover, the director of the Française in Paris is an officer of the state;

why then is it Utopian to suggest a like functionary as possible in our own land, together with the institution of which he is the head? Looking aside from the nation itself, has any state or city awakened to a sense of responsibility in this matter? Hardly one state or city, although here and there some person has left his town money for the municipal playhouse; or aggregations of individuals have given sums for the maintenance of a theatre, as in the case of the New Theatre experiment in Chicago a few years ago and the later and better known New Theatre of recent memory in New York City, and the interesting experiment of the Chicago Theatre Society; or private amateur experiments of the Little Theatre sort point the way. In Red Wing, Minnesota, Saginaw, Michigan, Pittsfield and Northampton, Massachusetts, and Denver, Colorado, there are theatres which are in some sense civic or quasi civic; either conducted by representatives of the people with the welfare of the community in mind, or made possible by

private or co-operative gifts having community interest in mind, and other cities are discussing the problem with an evident sense of its importance and practical bearing. So long as our municipal machinery is of the present dubious personnel (the honorable exceptions are known of men), it may not be well to jeopardize the interests of the playhouse by involving it in local politics.

In New Zealand, several cities conduct their own playhouses in such a manner as to make the books balance for the year. And looking to home, it is worth noting that two western states, Iowa and Wisconsin, have introduced bills in their respective legislatures requesting the municipal encouragement and control of play houses. A small town in the latter state, Richland Centre, having erected a structure for the combined purpose of city hall, club house and auditorium, and finding itself unable by law to maintain such a place of public recreation, the agitation of the matter by the citizens led to the introducing of the bill. In Iowa, at this writ-

ing, a bill has passed the House empowering cities to own and operate municipal theatres if the people demand it at a general election. Representative Charles W. Miller, who is sponsor for the bill, declares: "I have every confidence that the Municipal Theatre is a thing of the near future, whether my measure is adopted at this session or not." Evidently, the purely academic stage of this question is passed.

These sporadic object lessons establish hope for the future and sane, broad thinking has only just begun in this important social consideration. The movement is perceptibly under way; here and there a prophetic voice is heard; here and there a significant step is taken. In her recent noble book, "The Spirit of Youth and the City's Streets," Jane Addams writes these suggestive words:

"The classical city provided for play with careful solicitude, building the theatre as they built the market-place and the temple, and it came to anticipate the highest utterances of the poet at those moments when the

sense of pleasure released the national life. In the medieval city, the knights held their tourneys, the guilds their pageants, the people their dances, and the church made festival for its most cherished saints with gay street processions. Only in the modern industrial city have men concluded that it is no longer necessary for the municipality to provide for the insatiable desire for play."

Wise words, these, though a trifle ahead of the time; yet coming from a leader whom no one accuses of being doctrinaire, after her quarter century of superb practical social service. Her thought is very much what Matthew Arnold had in mind when he spoke those ringing words: "The theatre is irresistible; organize the theatre!"

We have but just begun, I say, but there are encouraging signs all about; surely, the waters are stirring at the breath of the Time spirit. Other things indicative of a change to a more enlightened outlook may be here set down.

Recall the worthy New Theatre attempt,

already mentioned, in Chicago, and connect with it the larger attempt in New York, which, whatever its shortcomings, and in spite of its short existence, did able and interesting work and sowed seed for the future. Also should be mentioned Donald Robertson's valiant effort for four years in Chicago, in which he received the friendly aid of the Art Institute, a quasi-civic indorsement, and made himself the logical director of the Theatre Society venture in that city which followed. Have in mind, too, the Children's Theatre in New York, now successfully revived, in which the late Mark Twain was so beneficially active. Recall what the People's Union accomplished in the same city through a specially appointed committee to furnish wise direction to playgoers and a reduced price for plays worth seeing. Realize also the wonderful work done for twenty years by Hull House in Chicago, to make the drama irradiate a squalid quarter and be a civilizing bond between a dozen nations—Zangwill's crucible for the melting

of race antagonisms. Notice that even the much maligned Frohman ventured on a Repertory Theatre in London a few years ago, with dubious financial results, due to wrong handling, but at the least testifying to a willingness on the part of a powerful, practical manager to experiment with the so-called higher drama. And the maintenance of the Repertory theatres in Manchester, Glasgow, and Liverpool, to say nothing of the more famous Abbey Theatre movement in Dublin, are further signs of the time. The proposed National Theatre in London, a memorial of Shakspeare's four hundredth anniversary in 1916, for which substantial subscriptions have already been made and which Parliament is discussing, has also its significance in the movement. Nor should the work of the Drama League of America, which, in its brief life of three years, has vitally interested many thousands of members in active service all over the land, established strong branches in twenty-four leading cities, started with success an educational

campaign, influenced the patronage of plays in both larger cities and smaller towns by the bulletin method, and so convinced theatre managers of its helpful influence as to gain their good will and financial support, be overlooked in the survey. The League does sensible constructive work, because it acts upon the sane assumption that to patronize a good play is to kill, or at least injure, a bad one; and upon the sensible belief that almost anything can be accomplished by organization and wide co-operation, a lesson long since taught us by the leaders of capital and labor. The getting together of all interested in a better playhouse for the people will surely produce analogous results. The establishment by Mr. Ames of The Little Theatre, in New York City, with the opportunity offered to witness plays which make the more intimate appeal and are often in one-act form, and the later Little Theatres in Philadelphia and Chicago, animated by the same general aims, together with the Toy Theatre of Boston, conducted by amateurs,

are all phases of the desire to escape from the dead level of the purely commercial theatre conductment.

So rapidly are organizations of various kinds forming, all actuated by the sincere desire to bring about better results in the theatre, that it is no easy matter to chronicle them. The National Federation of Theatre Clubs, the Independent Drama League in New York, the prospective Woman's Theatre, the French Theatre, these and other like activities, whether mere plans on paper or really in operation, are but phases of the one intention. In fact, in every aspect of theatre theory and practice, interesting experimentation is now under way.

Some time ago the Civic Club of Philadelphia, representing the best in that community, went on record, in Club action, that they would provide their members with information in advance concerning coming vicious entertainments, that they might be saved the unpleasantness of ascertaining the fact by attendance; the same service in principle now

being performed by the Drama League. Other straws, showing which way the wind blows, may be noted in the action of the civic authorities both of New York and Chicago, in stopping the further performance of certain immoral dramas, flaunting their viciousness at leading theatres, and the action of the Catholic Church in the matter of plays deemed injurious to the life of their people. I may be permitted to add, as one engaged in teaching in a large state University, that many high school folk have asked me for advice and direction in the matter of instruction in the drama in those typical public institutions. A widespread feeling has grown up that here is a weapon in the educational arsenal, as yet but little used. The public schools in Germany recognized this years ago and acted upon it. Some further consideration of the matter in its relation to school and college will be found in the chapter entitled "The Theatre and Education."

The particular significance in all these scattered manifestations, not without their

impressiveness when they are massed—is not that the attempts succeed or fail, but rather that such attempts and efforts are being put forth at all. To them may be also added the obvious new interest in the literature of the drama and the theatre, its home; an interest seen in the increasing publication of current plays of the better sort, native and foreign; the space given to the subject in our best periodicals; and the fact that schools and colleges everywhere are training young audiences to appreciate fine plays by presenting them constantly in their dramatic clubs, regarding the work as a serious, integral part of the English culture. In this connection may be mentioned for its usefulness, the Drama League's pamphlet, "A Selective List of Books About the Theatre and of Published Plays in English," which is quite the best and most complete thing of the kind in the tongue.

Meanwhile, what are the drawbacks, the defects? They exist, and it is no part of my purpose to ignore them. Some persons, for-

sooth, are so discouraged by their presence, that they take refuge in the past and mournfully wail over this institution called the playhouse; it is, to their mind, given over to evil, and it were useless to strive for its uplift. The striking betterment in many ways to be descried, makes this ostrich-like burying of one's head in the sand hardly a praiseworthy attitude. But let the difficulties be honestly confessed, since it is the first step toward overcoming them. Half a dozen may here be indicated.

To begin with, and very operative for harm, is the inherited prejudice which regards the theatre as a kind of vulgar, low indulgence, something to be tolerated, at the best, and on the whole an example of the traditional belief:

In Adam's fall,
We sinnèd all.

There is an historical reason why this unenlightened conception of the playhouse should have existed so long in this country and persisted even to our own day—although

it is now fast giving way to a more rational understanding of an institution which in other lands has always been regarded as one of the arts deserving state support.

Our ancestors of Puritan stock, before they left England, closed all the public theatres for nearly twenty years and ranked this pleasure on a par with bear-baiting and tavern debauchery. No wonder that such a view, brought to this land, became a thought, wellnigh an instinct, in time, flowering full bloom in declarations still heard, sometimes from laymen, sometimes, alas, from clergymen, that the theatre is Satan's work, to be abhorred by all decent persons. Of course, the sweeping condemnations simply mean, as a rule, that those who make them are hostile to an Anna Held comedy, or a vulgar vaudeville turn or a "Merry Widow" opera; the abuse of the playhouse, in other words, is confused with its proper use, and so we get a sad example of illogic. The heart of the person making such an argument is very often sound; but his thinking apparatus is

woefully out of repair. A proper treatment for such a patient is the homeopathic administration of a bolus compounded of equal parts of sweetness and light.

Surely, this is no attack on the Puritan, whose magnificent qualities some of us feel to be the finest fraction of our endowment; we can all thrill sympathetically when a George William Curtis, in terms of resonant eloquence, hymns their contribution to American civilization. But all the same, it is the plain truth that in their attitude toward the theatre in the past, and so far as it is found in the present, they illustrate the defect of their quality. It is told of Fitz James Stephen, product of Calvinistic Evangelicalism, that he "once smoked a cigar, but found it so delicious that he never smoked again." The Puritan is only slowly learning, even to-day, that joy as joy need not be of necessity evil, that the right kind of joy, in truth, as Stevenson happily tells us, may be a religious act.

Another misconception which hurts the

true interests of the theatre, is that embodied in the phrase, irritatingly persistent in recurrence: *Give the people what they want*. In other words, since it is of the very nature of the playhouse to represent Life—Life in no restricted sense, but, all of it, the high and the low, the foul and the fair; and since, moreover, many in an audience wish to see depicted the coarse, the brutal, the low and the vile, they should be allowed to have it. They have just as good a right, so runs the familiar argument, as those who desire only to witness the aspects of human nature which are uplifting and pure. The theatre is a democratic place, and the drama the theatregoers get will be what they call for by majority vote; and that is the business man in the box office justified. He proposes to give his audiences what they want, neither more nor less; if they show by their attendance that they want plays that are high, thoughtful, sweet and wholesome, let them shall have them; if the other kind, then shall they have those as well, for money talks, the box office is the ganglionic

centre of theatrical life, and to conduct a theatre is not to attempt to elevate the masses (or classes), but one way of making a living—or perhaps, more often, one way of bankruptcy. Such is the easy disposition of the matter heard every day and falling with maddening repetition upon our ears.

In reply to it, one or two plain truths may be put forward. As for the business man in the theatre, it may at once be granted that judged simply as a business man, it is quite unfair to hold him up to the principles of a reformer. If he honestly declare himself to be a business man, make no pretense, obey the law of the land, conducting his business upon accepted rules, he certainly should be estimated in the light of that avowed intention. He has a right to ask for the same consideration accorded to other business men; except that he should remind himself that he differs from the seller of shoes or of groceries in one important respect; he deals in certain commodities called thought and feeling, and therefore his business affects

the public morals, which neither shoes nor butter nor eggs do. This should, and will, give the best sort of theatre manager a sense of moral obligation to his patrons. We must be careful to be fair to the manager in this respect, consider his position, credit him with what good he achieves, and in general strive to do him justice; for sometimes the zealots of the opposite camp abuse him far beyond his deserts.

But the fundamental fallacy in this business view of the theatre lies in the assumption that it is the only one, that it may not be legitimate and yet leave room, nay, establish a crying need for, another view and a preferable method. Let the business man give the people what they want, if you will; but let the enlightened part of every community teach the people to want what they should have, and hence to have what they ought to want. Do this, and civilization advances, do it not and progress perishes from the face of human society. To realize it, we have only to look around and observe the parallels.

Everywhere we behold public libraries; do we give the people what they want in them? Certainly not. If we did, there would be less Shakspeare and more Laura Jean Libbey. No, the enlightened persons having charge of an institution which, although a creation of the people, is conceded to be educational in intent, continually strive to improve the reading taste of the patrons by all manner of devices; they refuse to buy trash, they frown upon filth, they exercise a kind of benevolent tyranny with regard both to the inclusion and exclusion of books. The library, one of the denotements of our civilization of which we are justly proud, is conducted upon a principle squarely opposed to the idea of following the people rather than guiding them.

Or take the local orchestra, which so many of our larger American cities are happily developing; and observe the same method and principle at work. First, a guarantee through the generosity of private citizens; then, gradually increasing public patronage,

and programs made up tactfully of selections always averaging better than would be demanded if the thing were submitted to popular vote. And the result, some grumbling here and there, but a steady improvement of the musical taste of the community, programs better and better, a genuine development of music standards. Finally great municipal pride in the Symphony orchestra, criticism drowned in a chorus of praise. And yet that community has craftfully been coerced into accepting what at first was too good for its own desires. One can have a sturdy faith in the People (capitalized) without indulging in a false idealization of their average standards in matters of art. The People, meaning thereby not a unit, but a vast heterogeneous mass made up of all manner of tastes and appetites and degrees of development, have demanded things since the beginning of years that, if granted, would have led to the bottomless pit; they need to be protected against themselves by those who think and know. Otherwise, Liberty, so called, be-

comes license, and personal freedom the right to ruin one's self.

These illustrations may suffice. To defend the give-the-people-what-they-want theory of the theatre, is to find one's self upon the horns of a dilemma; either one must declare that the method used with the library is un-American, undemocratic and unsuccessful or else that it is not a proper method to apply to the playhouse because the latter, unlike the library, is not educational. Few to-day would be so rash as to commit themselves to either statement. On the contrary, intelligent thought is more and more likely to agree that such an antiquated, puerile view of the theatre is not in accord with the best belief and practice of the present time, look where we may for parallels. To Percy Mackaye's motto, "imagination in recreation," might be added: self-respect in amusement.

A third drawback to the welfare of the theatre is the lack of a sense of duty in the premises on the part of the very class which we look to for help in all matters of improve-

ment and reform; the class whose attitude, generally speaking, is right toward other reforms. The explanation is easily to be found in the absence of any tradition of duty touching the playhouse, the fact that the very idea that it can be educational in its aim and influence is of recent appearance. That this sense of obligation will now be fast developed cannot be doubted; there are signs and to spare—some of them already enumerated—that within a short time one who exhibits no intelligence concerning the theatre, no feeling of responsibility in his playgoing habits, no conception of its cultural possibilities or ethical significance, will be written down a barbarian—just as he would if he showed no acquaintance with George Meredith as a Victorian novelist, or Whistler as an impressionist painter, or Wagner as a master of tone.

There is an idea abroad (to mention yet another drawback to a better view of the playhouse), which is prejudicial in its effect; I mean the belief that the so-called higher

drama is so high as to be out of sight; and that plays really worth while must be undramatic, stupid and sad—in other words, that culture means misery. The situation here is as unfortunate as it is complex; and must be so handled as to make it evident that by “best” we only mean what is wholesome, enjoyable, not too good for human nature’s daily food; thoughtful, but not drearily or exclusively intellectual; in brief, the rational amusement you would offer in other fields of art. It is not a counsel of perfection, nor an attack upon what the majority of normal humanity desire when they go to the play-house; which would be suicidal in an art which Nietzsche very properly calls “The art of the masses,” par excellence, and Strindberg declares to be “the people’s Bible.” Rather is it a protest against the banalities, stupidities and indecencies of comic opera, farce comedy, vaudeville and all their kind—the slap-stick appeals for public favor. With one theatre in every town which could be counted on to present clean, wholesome,

pleasurable plays, those in the community who wished to giggle at double meanings and rejoice in undraped anatomy, would still have ample opportunity, but others, with differing tastes, might have their proper food. And even the gigglers and gourmands of the flesh, since they are complex human beings capable of both good and bad, might be attracted to something better; certainly the good would have a constant tendency to kill the bad.

It is a thousand pities, for example, that Ibsen has been emphasized in this country upon his grimmest and gloomiest side, so that in the minds of too many he is a synonym for pathology and pessimism; as if "The Wild Duck" and "Hedda Gabler" were all of him; as if he were not also the creator of "The Pillars of Society," "An Enemy of the People," "The Lady from the Sea" and "A Doll's House," all of them bracing dramas of constructive thought and sound ethics. To know the more sombre plays alone, like "Ghosts," or the more mys-

tic, like the "Master Builder," however tremendous they may be, is not to be familiar with Ibsen in his rounded accomplishment and full message. But this is widely misunderstood and so the groans of the Tired Business Man, haled by his wife to a special performance of "Ghosts" or "Rosmersholm" (she has devoted a whole half year to the Norwegian in club study and of course knows him from A to Z), is heard in the land—all over it, in truth. I think we can afford to extend him a little sympathy; most of us have been tired once or twice in our lives, and the fact that he is o'erwearied when the night falls, is the fault in a measure of too strenuous American business methods. So that, taking the situation as it is, Ibsen is surely not the ideal fodder for him. In managing his case (poetic) justice must be tempered with mercy; he must be lured away from musical comedy and vaudeville and moving pictures by the via media of dramas like "The Man from Home," or "The Fortune Hunter," or "The Deep Purple." This

course of treatment, judiciously applied, will prepare him in time for an occasional dose of something more serious and literary. For he is a well meaning, if limited, fellow, your Tired Business Man, and whether he goes or not, he generally pays for the tickets.

The fact is that, historically, he is a by-product of the Puritan; a Puritan with a worldly coat on. He vaguely feels that the theatre simply should offer what he calls a "show," but unlike the Puritan, he proposes to enjoy it. He has little use for culture, or ethics, or unpleasantness in the playhouse. "I just want to be amused," he says, plaintively. Poor dear, he is really a pathetic object, and should with infinite tenderness be delicately inducted into a broader comprehension of the word amusement, his misconceptions cleared away in most friendly fashion, in no wise with scorn. For, after all, he has a death grip on one idea that is entirely right: that primarily, pleasure is what all the world goes to the theatre for. And that his taste is at the bottom sound,

is shown by the way he likes dramas such as "Cousin Kate," and "A Message from Mars," and "The Music Master," and "The Melting Pot," and "The Man from Home," and "The Witching Hour"; yes, and even "The Servant in the House," if you do not tell him too much about its ineffability in advance. Our mistake with him lies in conceiving of him as a lost soul, and insisting on drastic measures of reform; and his mistake (for he must take his share of the blame), is in thinking that a play cannot be fun and at the same time be of cultural influence. He must be made to realize that to see a work of art may not be the equivalent of taking unpleasant medicine; that there is no real antagonism between pleasure and profit; since the wise men to-day are telling us that the most fruitful progress always comes when the pleasurable is most active.

Another phase of this current misconception may be noted in the idea that literary drama consists of bad play-making orna-

mented with the flowers of rhetoric by persons who know (or think they know) how to make poetry or fiction or essays, who perchance have reputation in those fields, but unhappily conceive themselves competent to build good plays. Hence, their work is hailed and heralded by the elite as something very choice and the first night audience (there usually is not a second) goes forth into the world with Oh's! and Ah's! and is bitter when the critics declare the stuff is awful, and the general public will not come. With considerable justice, be it confessed, Philistia raises its hands and cries: "From literary drama, good Lord deliver us!"

Of course, the trouble here is, that the literary persons overlook the fact that a fundamental of all good drama is skill in the doing of it, and the breath of life infused into the product. Nothing is more difficult in the whole range of creative literature than to make a play which shall at the same time answer the demands of art and yet with skilled vitality drive its meaning home to

the general public. Luckily, this lesson is fast being learned and the number of misguided ones who turn airily from other fields of literary endeavor to pen a play for the nonce, without a scintilla of technic, is growing beautifully less. Nowadays, our Barries and Zangwills across the water, or here at home our Tarkingtons, Davises, Moodys and Mackayes, turn from poetry and fiction and by dint of hard work acquire the method of a different and difficult form, and so win plaudits therein.

Yet another tendency which hurts the welfare of the theatre, is the prevalent sneer at the present, the overpraise of past times. But this is not peculiar to our day; like the poor, the *laudator temporis acti* is always with us, and on the whole very much harder to bear. "Stop my subscription to the paper," shouted the irate patron of *Punch*. "It isn't half so good as it was twenty years ago." "No," replied the canny representative of a great British institution, as he erased the name, "it never was."

Let us acknowledge, however, that this type is often maddening, familiar, even ancient, as he may be. One gets very weary of his voice as he complacently drones along: "O, the great drama of the past! The trouble now is we have no playwrights, no real plays, no players, no cultivated playgoers (save myself), no anything which goes to make a condition illumined even by a ray of hope. Give us plays that are art, literature, and the theatre will take care of itself without the wasted labor of those who see a little betterment here and there."

The worst of this twaddle is, that it deceives so many; for nothing is so easy as to set up for a critic by pooh-poohing and patronizing what is so near and new as to be hard to judge with independence. Seemingly solid and persistent reputations are built up by this method; one of the minor mysteries in an essentially mysterious world. A noble discontent with the present is always welcome, because it is forward-looking and constructive; but this other kind is, like all Gaul,

divided into three parts: into pretence, ignorance and idiocy. When it is ignorance, it is simply an exhibition of inadequate intellectual endowment; but when it is a purposeful open-eyed discrediting of modern accomplishment, it is a form of dishonesty, and to be treated as such. It is all the more reprehensible to-day, in view of the remarkable movement toward better things artwise and ethically, in the theatre. It is this change for the better, along with much that is still bad, deplorably so, that is really significant and makes the present moment significant to an eye which refuses to see through a glass darkly.

The practical managers are not so bad as they have been painted. The Syndicate, so often used as a sort of bogey to scare children withal, and truth to tell, having its good as well as its evil side, is broken, so that healthful competition will increasingly have a chance. Actor-managers, half a dozen of them, are exercising a salutary influence, on the whole, and actors are more than glad to

play in dramas sound as art and as life. We have a good number of dramatic critics scattered over the land who possess intelligence, honesty of purpose, training and a sense of higher possibility in their calling. The able critics are by no means all in New York, nor are quite all the critics there corrupt and sycophantic. And we shall get more dramatic critics of the best sort just in proportion as the public wakes up to the very great service such men can do in helping to educate an enlightened theatre audience. To be perfectly frank with ourselves, the main trouble is with us, the theatregoing public. It is idle to shift the blame to the shoulders of actor, manager or any other scapegoat; the chief sinner is the citizen who refuses to see anything in the playhouse but a low, frivolous form of meaningless amusement.

All have a duty here. We can help individually and collectively. In the first place, we can go to the theatre, instead of turning our back upon it; and next, we can go to it intelligently, by which I mean, we can

bring culture and conscience to bear upon the theatre habit. To go to a theatre intelligently, is to know the significance of what you select to see; and to demand that it should truthfully show life, give the pleasure proper to art and, in the broad sense, do us good. If you cut off any one of the three from the desirable activity of the playhouse, you cripple its power and becloud its function. If you excise them all, you have naught left but filth, frivolity and fashion.

The first duty, therefore, is to be aware of your orientation on facing playward. And culture and conscience are necessary to make this feasible. For example, in a certain magazine article, a clergyman widely known in religion and literature was discoursing upon this theme, and while expressing his conviction of the potential power for good in the playhouse, declared himself after the manner of Jeremiah with regard to its present state. One sentence I must quote: "I seldom go to the theatre myself, because I do not know what I am liable to run into, even when the actors are first-class."

In this remark, all unconsciously, the writer offers himself as a magnificent illustration of the traditionally philistine view of the Anglo-Saxon race in respect of the playhouse. Why, in heaven's name, does he not know what he is "liable to run into"? The answer is easy: Because he (like millions more) has not dreamed that it is a part of his cultural and his Christian duty to become intelligent in the affairs of this people's art, this mighty educational influence, the theatre. In his attitude toward any other phase of thought and life, we should, as likely as not, find him sane and progressive; here, he is about as modern as the megatherium. It is easy for him or for any other man of like education to know in advance about the plays he sees, if he is willing to take the same amount of time and trouble which he would not hesitate to take over some other social or literary question; and the theatre is both. It is, indeed, discouraging when the very men who should lead opinion in the matter, go haphazard to the playhouse, blunting their own perceptions, losing the good that

might be gained, and furnishing a very bad example to others.

Culture should guide us aright to the desirable play; conscience, not for a moment blinded by artistic values or literary excellencies, stimulating as they are, must insist on the discrimination between large, noble tragedy which broadens sympathy, and that which is merely devitalizing; between humor that is clean, alleviating and corrective, and that which is low, cheap and asinine; between an earnest and honest attempt to depict the world as it is, and such representations as constitute an insidious arousal of the beast in man. We can all act upon the principle as individual theatregoers; and also in our many associate and corporative capacities,—as we have seen is being done so widely, by clubs and organizations innumerable, all over the land; by none more, or more helpfully, than by the women's clubs of America.

In our vision of the City Beautiful, now beginning to take form and substance through the teaching of the wise, we may hopefully

anticipate in every city of the land a central and seemly structure above whose portal the legend writ shall not be:

“All hope abandon ye who enter here,”

but rather, “Come unto me, all ye who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” Nor by *rest* shall we mean mere animal vacuity of mind and surcease from the outer world of hunger and work and love; but that nobler rest which signifies refreshment, recreation, because the mind and the emotions are symmetrically aroused by the presentation of Life so broadly, genially, fruitfully, that all who witness are taken out of their small and monotonous round of personal activity and made participants in the greatness of man’s destiny, co-heirs in his universal sorrow and joy. And when the theatre is thus made a Temple of Life, wisely instructing man even while it furnishes him with rational pleasure, it will be known for a sacred place, and reckoned as a pride of the nation.

III

THE TENTATIVE PERIOD

THE subject of the American drama is perilously modern. The academic mind, indeed, regards it as practically non-existent. To get a lively sense of this, one has only to turn to the many manuals and historical studies devoted to our literary development, and mark the absence of any adequate treatment of the drama. If it receive any notice at all, it is exceptional. In almost all such books, it is tacitly assumed that no writers who possess literary excellence have used the play form. The situation is humorously hit off by Mr. W. P. Eaton in his "The American Stage of To-day," where he reports Mr. Huneker's reply to an inquiry as to what he was engaged in writing.

"'About the drama,' " he replied.

"'American'?"

“‘I said about the drama,’” Mr. Huneker retorted, with a Monalisacal smile.”

But the critics are fast changing with the drama itself, and, more slowly, the public. Writers on stage matters like Matthews, Eaton, Hamilton, Bennett and a few others are doing in this country what has been done in England by Shaw, Walkeley, Archer and their kind, to inform and direct an intelligent theatre-going and drama-knowing public.

The fact that an intelligent attitude was so long delayed is explained, of course, in the late birth of the native drama worthy of serious attention. It is a thing, one might fairly say, of the present generation; hardly to be reckoned with before 1870, a year, it may be added, significant for a general movement in literature summed up in the familiar word, realism. If Miss Ellen Terry may be taken as a witness, this was true even later. In “The Story of My Life” she says: “In 1883 there was no living American drama, as there is now.” And she makes the

interesting remark that "the true dramatic pleasure of the people is, I believe, in such plays, where very complete observation of certain phases of American life, and very real pictures of manners are combined with comedy almost child-like in its naïveté," a description not inapplicable to much that is seen to-day.

Expressing it in sweeping terms, we might say that the drama on native soil has passed through the three stages of neglect, imitation of foreign models, and independence; the third, having but just begun and of genuine promise for the near future. These stages represent the Colonial, Revolutionary and modern periods of our development, and the really fruitful and significant part of the movement lies within the present generation; a span of thirty to forty years. The older play-making, interesting as it may be to the specialist, interesting indeed as all evolutionary processes are to the historical student, is mostly negligible from the point of view of literature or of skilful play making; the

drama that has value as art and message in the interpretation of Life. No wonder, when the drama in the United States is so recently born, that we find an acute critic referring to it as "Our Infant Industry." Nor has it, like other American industries, been protected by a prohibitive tariff; foreign goods, in the way of translations and adaptations beyond all reckoning, have deluged the land during the period of imitation.

The earliest period can for our purposes be rather summarily dispatched. Naturally, the colonists when they were cut off from the mother land had scant time and little inclination to consider the theatre either as a means of amusement or a serious art. Indeed the Puritan element which came to this country in the early seventeenth century, cherished a distinct prejudice against the play-house: shown in the sentiment that closed the public theatres of England for a term of years and damaged the welfare of dramatic literature, imperilling for a long time the very existence of drama as a vital stage product.

The early day in America was practical in its demands, political in its interests, utilitarian in its necessities. An art cannot well flourish in such soil. Technically, however, we may say that American drama has a life of more than two centuries and a half. The researches of Mr. John J. Neidig have shown that so early as 1640 a play was written by Jesuit priests in this country. Even religion, it would seem, did not protect the early inhabitants from the universal human itch for dramatic composition, which date carries dramatic writing back from 1752, hitherto named as the beginning, over a century. Mr. Neidig has also found evidence that the first play was acted in Williamsburg, Va., in 1702.

Ignoring the London players, who in 1752 presented Shakspeare in New York and Philadelphia, and sundry dramas written for amateur production, Royall Tyler's "The Contrast," seen in the metropolis in 1787, was genuinely American in theme, the first of its kind to be given professionally upon

native ground. It is significant for its introduction of that stock figure of Jonathan, which was to become so serviceable in the later drama; and for the commendable crying up of homespun things, afterward to be seen in "Horse-shoe Robinson," "Davy Crockett," and other types. Thus it had a native quality. Two years later came "The Father," of William Dunlap, whose services as theatre manager and historian of the American theatre, as well as prolific play-maker, make him the most conspicuous of the earlier influences in our dramatic development. The themes chosen by these and other early writers for the stage were pre-vaillingly foreign, however. The shadow of a foreign dramatist like Kotzebue lay long and large over the native land. But imitation, lowliest of compliments, was the rule; adaptation engaged the main strength of the pioneers.

There is point in Ambrose Bierce's definition of a dramatist in his "Devil's Dictionary": "One who adapts from the French."

Occasionally, as when J. K. Paulding set the negro on the stage, or John Murdock did the same for the Quaker, there was early evidence of a feeling for native characters. The professional companies confined their itinerary to New York, Boston, Philadelphia and Baltimore, with an occasional sally to one of the larger southern cities; and there was naturally an almost complete absence of that wonderfully organized system which to-day enables practically the whole country to see a popular piece or player. My account also leaves out the closet play, which, like the poor, is always with us, and amateur performances as well; otherwise mention might be made of Brackenbridge's "The Battle of Bunker Hill," which was presented in 1776 by school children, the author being at the time a teacher. Regular theatres existed before the Revolution in several northern and southern cities, although Boston did not have one until near the close of the century, in 1794.

It is interesting to find Dunlap, at the

close of his invaluable "History of The American Theatre," with the situation in 1832 in mind, lamenting the deterioration of the playhouse in this land (the same old inevitable cry), and suggesting in the most enlightened modern way a national theatre as the proper way out; "if the expenses of a national theatre," he says, "should exceed the receipts, let it be supplied by increased taxes on taverns and tippling houses." His plea for the theatre as an engine of civilization is a broad and rightminded one that can hardly be improved upon now. Especially is he to be commended for so frankly placing the influence of the institution upon an educative basis and assuming its moral obligation to the community. To read over his list of dramatic authors who contributed up to Dunlap's day to the stage, is to be struck with the ephemeral nature of literary activity. Here are no less than a hundred play-makers, to say nothing of some thirty anonymous dramas, with such names as Cooper, John Howard Payne, George P. Morris,

James K. Paulding and Samuel Woodworth represented: and not a single play of them all has survived to our own day. Evidently, it was a time of European domination, of timid initiative, of defective technic, or of no technic at all. It is well to realize this by way of present encouragement, when some praiser of past times like Mr. William Winter is painting in all the colors of the rainbow the earlier conditions of the theatre, the loss of which he so eloquently laments. We can gladly concede to such an idealist the sterling players of the past and their personal sense of the dignity of their art, without for a moment blinding ourselves to the general improvement of the state of the theatre during the present generation.

In other words, in America, as in England, the idea of the stage having a vital relation to literature, and not a kind of "underground connection," as a clever British critic has put it of late,—was not being helped along by the dramatic happenings; gradually, the very class, small but influential, upon whose suf-

frages sound drama had to depend, was receiving the impression that, regarded as an art, or an institution which ought to do with letters, the stage did not exist.

To pass from the period of neglect to that of general activity, when the theatre has become an institution widely patronized, and play-making is prolific and profitable, is to reach the final quarter of the nineteenth century—practically our own time. A careful examination of our theatrical annals from 1800 to 1875, and particularly from the mid century to the date when Robertson in England and Bronson Howard in this country began to get a hearing for work genuinely and encouragingly modern, will show how imitative and provincially dependent the English-speaking drama still was upon foreign inspiration and material. In the Union Square Theatre and Wallack's, those sterling New York playhouses of the past, the offerings during twenty-five years are so prevalingly British or continental, more or less doctored for the presumed American demand,

that a really native play in motive and manufacture is as rare as an endowed theatre in the United States to-day. An exception here and there may be noted: as in Mrs. Mowatt's "Fashion," which in 1845 was significant for its satirical observation of New York society, its attempt to get away from the London point of view. But such sporadic instances only emphasize the dearth.

Of course, this was a time of notable players: of Hackett, and Forrest, and Cushman, and Laura Keane; of Davenport and Barrett, the Barney Williams and the Florences; of Warren and Jefferson, the Wallacks, the Drews and the Booths, to mention but a few names. Still, the prevalence of great actors, now standing out in high relief with the passing of years, is by no means commensurate with the general welfare of drama. Players of genius, bred upon the elder traditions of the stage and using the standard dramatic literature of the past, can and in fact commonly do exist prior to the development of anything like a worthy native drama.

They are an impulsion from better conditions in the past. The influence of a distinguished actor-manager like Lester Wallack, for example, strong as it was in keeping up the finer traditions of the profession, was quite negligible on the side of native production. The same is true of Augustin Daly. In fact, the advantage and disadvantage of our connection with British culture were both illustrated in this earlier development.

The career of Dion Boucicault is illuminative of the statement that we were still in the period of imitation. Here was an Irishman who, as a very young man in London, produced that brilliant comedy of manners, "London Assurance"; who secured an enviable reputation before he came to America; who, after he had become practically an American actor and playwright, won wide popularity and critical applause for such Irish plays as "The Shaughran" and "Colleen Bawn"; and then, by dramatizing Irving's classic, gave us in "Rip Van Winkle" the most famous drama of its kind produced on

American soil and with all its obvious faults, technical and spiritual, still a play of vital stage value. Merely viewed as an object lesson in the native possibilities, "Rip Van Winkle" deserves our suffrages, quite aside from the familiar fact that it solidified the name and fame of the best-loved comedian of our time. Audiences bothered little over loose construction or conventional characterization, if only they could hear Jefferson say:

"If Schneider was here, he would know me"; or might listen when he asked that terrible question:

"Are we so soon forgotten when we are gone?"

Clara Morris, in reporting a conversation with him, has testified that Boucicault really desired to make use of native material more than he did,—and that the phenomenal early success of "London Assurance" stood in the way of a cordial attitude toward anything American. This is but one illustration of the general feeling.

Another figure, picturesque, forceful, progressive, was that of Steele Mackaye, whose son Percy is so honorably maintaining the family relation to the drama and the theatre which is its home. As actor, playwright, teacher, lecturer, his inventive genius was very influential upon the general welfare of the American theatre during the decades 1870-1890. Including adaptations, he wrote no less than eighteen plays, one of which, "Hazel Kirke," was not only the most popular piece of its time, but distinctly a step forward in technic and legitimate handling of the family motive. But Steele Mackaye's dominant personality and many sided gifts left their impress in other directions than dramaturgy. He invented the double stage of the Madison Square Theatre, was architect of the old Lyceum Theatre, devised the Spectatorium at Chicago; taught Delsarte principles of gesture and carriage; helped to found the Sargent School, now known as the American Academy of Dramatic Art, and in other ways not a few had a main share in

improving what might be called the art of the theatre. He was an earlier Belasco. Although prevailingly his dramas were not native in theme, his "Paul Kauvar," dealing with aspects of anarchy, showed him as sensitive to vital modern material, and of his influence as a whole it can be truly said that it was high and beneficial.

Another pioneer, of still greater significance in the development, and indeed for several reasons the most remarkable man of his time, was the late James A. Herne. As our literary history continues and the importance of the drama in that evolution becomes more and more apparent, the name of Herne will be sure to take an ever securer place; he was, in the strict sense, a creative force in the theatre, ably championing the new doctrine of realism and in his own works furnishing admirable early examples of a faith and method which were to triumph in the efforts of a school now obviously symptomatic of our day.

Some twenty years ago, in Boston, his

"Margaret Fleming" was very properly regarded by a select audience as the most significant play using the realistic formula yet seen in America; it is probable that the opinion might still stand, despite the good work we have hailed since, if it were our privilege to-day to possess the drama in printed form. That vastly liked play, "Shore Acres," of less importance spiritually than the other, nevertheless stands as easily the best of all the rustic drama of realistic intent. And in 1899 the noble "Griffith Davenport," which promptly failed in New York, was perhaps the most thoughtful and consistent treatment of the Civil War theme written in the country, not forgetting the sterling war plays of Gillette and Howard. An effective actor who has transmitted histrionic blood to his daughters, and a wonderful stage manager, Herne was something more: a man thinking truthfully and strongly about life, aware that the theatre, to fulfil its function, must display Life as it is, while ministering also to our sense of beauty; that, in the language of the

able Irish dramatist, Synge, "on the stage we must have reality and we must have joy."

I am sure both truth and joy are to be found in a drama like "Shore Acres," which we might make the mistake of thinking of as too homely and commonplace. The joy comes from the thoroughgoing kindliness of the author's conception of human character, his right attitude toward life. The old lighthouse keeper becomes a personal friend of the auditor, it is good to have known him.

And along with this sane, sweet depiction of humanity, goes an exquisite verisimilitude with life, such a lovingly faithful transcript of the human scene that a blasé Broadway audience will sit silent and intense as the final curtain descends upon—what? A sensational ensemble moment, after the manner of the past? Not at all; there is "nothing doing," in the current phrase. We are merely saying *good-by* to that same well-beloved old lighthouse man, before he retires for the night. And the homely, every-day verity of it, somehow, holds us more enchained, actu-

ally, than if, as in "The Kreutzer Sonata," Miss Blanche Walsh were shooting somebody dead.

For, the shooting is an assault upon our nerves; but the *good-by* an assault upon our sympathies,—which is better. It is this truth and sympathy with life, together with a sturdy independence which finds native themes more stimulating than those from overseas, which makes Mr. Herne so deeply significant in the development. To be sure, the foreign subserviency is not entirely dead; the activities of Mr. Charles Frohman still look abroad for inspiration as truly as did those of Lester Wallack. But he is the exception, after all, and the current has now set strong in favor of home production; most managers nowadays showing an eager desire for native material. At present, we cannot alter Sidney Smith's contemptuous query: "Who reads an American book?" to read "Who writes an American play?" since they *are* being written on all sides, often with great success, and also being printed. But it

took time to bring this about, and in the process of effecting the change, James A. Herne will always have an honorable mention.

It can be safely set down as a general statement that we shall not have a sound drama until it is the custom to offer the plays in book form; since the kind of audience behind worthy drama is only to be secured when it can add to the experience of the playhouse representation, that of the quiet perusal of the dramatic material as a piece of literature; thereby appreciating its acting value all the more, and only in this way becoming aware of certain of its virtues.

We see all this more plainly than we did twenty to twenty-five years ago, because the thoughtful, critical elements in society are now coming to consider the drama as an increasingly important part of letters: and its home, the theatre, as an educational force which can be used for the nobler purposes of a people's art. Too briefly, the stately New Theatre in New York was a civic ob-

ject lesson which reminded citizen and stranger alike of this enlightened change. In earlier days, the situation was less self-conscious, and the intricate relations of playwriting as a profession, theatre conductment and the social standing of actors were then, as ever, such that any despite of one, inevitably reacted upon the others.

It will be well, I believe, before coming to a direct examination of the significant groups of dramatists in our really productive period, to dwell a little upon this point, which seems to me of great importance for a clear comprehension of the hopeful outlook and the removal of various misconceptions which, so long as they exist, are so many drawbacks to progress.

In the first place, it is a plain fact that the professional welfare of the actor has improved; I mean, he is to-day safer in his contracts, more comfortable, not to say, luxurious, in his travel, and better housed in his theatres, than a generation ago. Mr. Winter, remembering the personal dignity of

men like Palmer, Wallack and Daly, goes on to draw the false deduction that the actual physical equipment of the past was superior to the present, which is certainly not so. As an organized business, the theatre was never in such a good estate as now, despite the incidental disadvantages of centralization; disadvantages being rapidly removed by the breaking of the so-called Syndicate. So that, merely regarded as a profession to enter, that of the player's is more attractive than of yore. The hardships, uncertainties and dangers are almost entirely of the earlier and often idealized time. Engage a veteran player in conversation when he is reminiscential, and see how frankly he admits this. Mr. Jefferson, in the delightful record of his life, tells some home truths about this matter.

Along with the betterment on the material side, has gone a commensurate social improvement. The actor, as such, is more respected than he was of old. Taking a wide historical survey, it may be stated that it has taken some three hundred and fifty years to

make a gentleman out of the strolling vagabond of the sixteenth century. Do not confuse two things: histrionic genius has always been admired, even petted; it made Southampton the patron of Shakspeare and put David Garrick into the Literary Club as easy familiar with Sir Joshua, Johnson and the rest. What I would imply is, that up to the memory of living man, the actor, not as an individual but as representative of his craft, was looked at askance, admired fearfully and afar, as an uncanny if not wicked phenomenon. "When I went down Martha's Vineyard way years ago, to establish a country residence," said a veteran and distinguished player to the writer, "there were three reasons why the inhabitants felt like putting a cordon round the local bank: I was a democrat, a Unitarian and—an actor!"

Recall the Crummleses in "Nicholas Nickleby," the Fotheringays of "Pendennis," the attitude toward Garrick of the father in the play of that name, "a play-actor forsooth!" and you get a few nineteenth century sur-

vivals of this feeling. Almost down to the present era, a slight flavor of the disreputable hung round the actor still; nowhere more so than in practical, utilitarian America, where the Artist type is at the best a queer vagary of natural law: the law which declares that man's true mission here on earth is to make material commodities and collect cash.

Yes, the actor had to wait until our own immediate day to see himself knighted in the persons of Irving, Wyndham, Hare, Squire Bancroft and Beerbohm Tree. The change has come from the spreading of a broader conception of art, from the gradual disappearance of the Puritan prejudice against the playhouse, and from the increasing tendency to draw into the profession folk of education and culture and to give them a precedent training in the dramatic schools. It has a wonderful effect upon a profession to give a diploma or other badge testifying to labor done for its sake. The scholastic may choke genius, but at least it makes for social

unfamiliar and a certain variety of wandering. Doubtless, the whole business of degree getting and giving is largely exaggerated in importance throughout the scholar world. At the same time, I sincerely believe that the Diamond Behind, as such, a product of our time, exercises a salutary effect upon the public mind, in very much of what it does for the pupil, in leading dignity and wandering to the player's life role, and to an originally dramatic and coherent employment.

I speak of the better knowing of players. Of course, nobody in his senses would fail to admit that a typical modern playhouse is a marvel of luxury, legroom and convenience compared with the barn-like structures of the past. The very word "barn-storming" tells the story! How, indeed, the old-time actors ever lived through the rigors of one season, knocked about exposed to the elements and to the hardly more hospitable members of dining-rooms and taverns as they were, is among the enigmas. Presumably doing "one-night stands" no doubt

still have to rough it in these later and more luxurious days; but in the details of heating, lighting, and general equipment, the play-houses of the present make those of the past seem like an unpleasant dream. Add to this, the commodious and smooth management of the itinerary, in almost all travelling companies, and it will be realized that much of the horror of road work has vanished with the present dispensation. Especially in the case of women, this aspect of the comparison cannot justly be overlooked.

With regard to the technic of actors now and formerly, the critic finds himself on particularly ticklish ground. No subject is more debated, in none is there a greater lack of critical knowledge. The remarks heard daily as to so-and-so not being actors, but just themselves on the stage, are proof enough. Then, too, we all of us have to fight that glamour of the Past so warping to human judgment: the work of a player dead and gone and hence canonized, is always seen with an aura around it, which separates him

from the common herd of histrions who have the misfortune to be living still. Genius, said one of the brothers Goncourt, is dead talent: a wise saying. I myself missed seeing Forrest, the elder Booth, Ristori and Charlotte Cushman. But with a fair knowledge of Salvini, Janaushek, and Edwin Booth, the period of Wallack, Barrett, Warren, and their like, I feel sure that a comparison of the elder and younger generations would not be altogether to the disparagement of ours. If we heard Forrest to-day, it is likely we would find that he ranted, was rhetorical and bombastic, tearing his passion to tatters after the robust fashion of 1840.

And this leads to a point important to the clear understanding of modern acting, the plastic art of the player. Strictly speaking, no comparison can or should be made between the two schools, since the things compared are unlike in aim and kind. The old-time technic was suited to the platform stage of a generation ago, intermediate between the Elizabethan apron stage jutting far down

into the auditorium, and the picture-frame stage of to-day—the proscenium stage of illusion. Upon the stage of 1850, where the platform projected far in front of the curtain, the former actor strutted and harangued, enlarging all his effects perforce and over-vocalizing in a manner which, used in the Lyceum Theatre or Belasco's to-day, would suggest a fire in the next building. The appositeness of Pinero's delightful satire in "Trelawny of the Wells," upon the days of Robertson's comedies, the days of the seventies, lay in part in this difference. The old actor, Telfer, with his memories in the grandiloquent by-gone, can see nothing in Tom Wrench's piece: Wrench, standing for Tom Robertson, as the bringer-in of the newer realism.

"Do you like the play?" Rose asks Telfer.

"Like it?" he replies, with scorn; "there's not a speech in it, my dear, not a real *speech*—nothing to dig your teeth into."

Telfer's soul, you observe, fairly yearns for the stilted, the artificial. One who to-

day witnesses a performance of Robertson's "Caste," his best-known piece, can appreciate the chasm that lies between the present technic and that of the past generation. That drama now creaks in all its joints, yet it was a thrilling advance upon what went before and remains a piece of work that really counts in the development of English drama. The failure to recognize the radical change from rhetorical drama to the latter-day *drame intime* is what led the New Theatre to miss an opportunity, and closed its doors untimely; inducing Mr. Granville Barker, after one look at its auditorium, to hie him home again. The mistake was, to try to unite drama and its left-handed son, the opera.

In a word, then, the technic to-day is admirably adapted to the changed conditions. It may register a loss in breadth and tonality, possibly unfitting it for the romantic elevation of Shakspearean blank verse; but,—to balance this,—it gains in verisimilitude, the exquisite reproduction of the very accent and

motion of Life. That is the proper technic for the modern picture stage; the stage of realistic illusion; and it is simply nonsense to prate of the past as if the older method were advisable to-day or even possible. It is as extinct as the dodo bird. In saying this, I would not be understood to imply that verse plays are now taboo or that poetry in the broad sense is not as welcome as ever on the stage. This matter receives discussion in a later chapter. What I do mean is, that the aim of dramatic art, being different from the past, the methods of the actor inevitably have changed also, and his work must now be estimated by the new standard which is the result.

In view of these considerations, is it not fitting to laud with special laudation the men of the transition, the pioneers who blazed the trail, the intermediate figures who, beginning with and becoming wonted to older ways and ideals, found themselves at last lagging superfluous on the boards or else under the stern necessity of reconstruct-

ing technic and ideals to suit an altered age? We can without exaggeration claim that we have now a definite school of American playwrights; a school young but lusty, prosperous, full of promise. But this could never have been, had it not been for the work, tentative, experimental and largely lonely, of many an unnamed early writer, and later dramatists like Boucicault, Mackaye, Boker and still others; and unless Bronson Howard, at a time when it was a daring thing to do so, had turned from journalism and, first among the dramatic writers in this country, devoted himself with a single-eyed devotion throughout the rest of his life to the writing of plays, plays that were to found an American school.

IV

TRUTH

THAT the late American drama should reproduce the native life with more of verity than ever before, is quite what the general tendency of modern letters would lead us to expect. The desire to get closer to the fact and give the value of verisimilitude to the picture, has been the dominant literary mood of our generation. American drama reflects it as part of modern drama. And the drama everywhere, which is now striving for this verity, has lagged behind the novel in this stern insistence upon truth and has only recently taken the cue from fiction. Mr. Bernard Shaw's description of the stage as the "last sanctuary of unreality," was hardly undeserved a few years ago, although it is fast becoming less applicable.

Indeed, the fact that the native playwrights are turning by preference to home-given

themselves and no longer feel that a foreign narrative speaks to them. It is an inside part of the movement toward the ideal; once a recognition of the Ideal and the Ideal, as offering worthy matter for dramatic treatment, is a protest against the idea that because a thing is remote in time or place and dies to the eye it must for that reason be more promising for imaginative handling.

The various conventions of the stage, for one thing, have favored verisimilitude. Then, too, the mixed character of the theatre audience has made it more natural not only as a conventional presentation of humanity but especially in what is commonly called a pleasant ending. The thoughtful novel-reader has long had the opportunity to see life in its true physiognomy, even if the features look grim; yet that type of audience has been in a sad minority in the playhouse. Moreover, the same person would become more primitive when once he was merged in a theatre crowd and saw the stage picture through the eyes of others, as well as through

his own. As Coleridge has acutely expressed it, when once he became auditor, he engaged in that "willing suspension of disbelief" which is for the dramatist an ideal state of mind for the reception of the dramatic message. It is rapidly coming to the point, in our drama, when the dramatist who deals with contemporary life (as he now so often does), and wishes to secure his effect, must not depart far in his presentation from such a marshalling of events and such display of psychology as shall be credibly within the cognizance of the audience. The possible drawback in this for imaginative and poetic delineation is obvious; but that there is advantage, too, cannot be gainsaid. Playmakers now feel the compulsion to give the effect of reality in environment and the denotements external and internal of character. The folk of the play must dress, speak and act as those given human beings would under the circumstances. More latitude is, of course, conceded to dramatic forms like farce, melodrama, and poetic tragedy; but even there, a

certain logic of cause and effect is more and more demanded. Even if the premises are unlikely or impossible, the handling of the precedent conditions must be logical and illusion thereby secured.

Certain dramatists of the day seem especially to illustrate this insistence upon truth of atmosphere and detail. Beyond question, the pioneer in its initiation was Herne, whose labor in blazing the trail for coming workers has been described. In his latest efforts, Steele Mackaye was also useful; while Howard, as he developed and grew bolder with the progress of the realistic school, contributed markedly in such dramas as "The Henrietta" and "Shenandoah," respectively a play of business life and a play of the Civil War.

To get a measure of his growth one may compare his early farce, "Saratoga," practically contemporaneous with Robertson's "Caste," with his latest plays, "Aristocracy" and "Kate." The romantic comedy of the home, "The Banker's Daughter," led on to

"Young Mrs. Winthrop," pleasantly remembered in the old Lyceum Theatre days; and the charm of "Old Love Letters," with its brevity of form that looks forward to the present, may still be felt. Mr. Clayton Hamilton has said of him that "he had no message," which is true enough. But he was a worthy pioneer in the handling of native material and never forgot the primary business of giving amusement; and his eye was keen to detect the unused opportunity. All the credit of one who pointed the path belongs to this vigorous playwright, who imparted to his stage stories something of the flavor of letters, and interwove the complications of domestic life with those of society, politics and business.

Close on the heels of men like Mackaye and Howard, come the veterans, Gillette and Thomas, in the making of plays which, while lacking thesis and aiming above all at story value, have seized with zest on enjoyable aspects of the native life. Their contribution has thus been helpful in the extreme, and in-

fluent in demonstrating the feasibility of a professional devotion to such motives and ideals. Both these men have, by dint of a long and steady application of their talents to the business of dramaturgy, become skilled craftsmen, able to extract from a story every ounce of its dramatic value, and expert in the details of that difficult endeavor. Thinking of the two together for a moment, it may be said that both have shown considerable range in subject matter, Mr. Thomas, perhaps, extending his survey more broadly; giving us the South in "Alabama," the West in "Arizona," New York in "The Witching Hour," "As a Man Thinks," and many more plays, and laying tribute on Europe in such pieces as "The Harvest Moon" and "The Model." Mr. Gillette, on the other hand, who has had the privilege to write plays for his own impersonation, has had to yield less to the temptation to trim his drama to suit others; and has seemed to find his main strength in the war motive, as such admirable military plays as "Held by the Enemy" and

"Secret Service" testify. To say this is not to overlook the finished technic and genuine invention which go to explain the unqualified success of so legitimate a melodramatic work as "Sherlock Holmes." Of late, Mr. Thomas has shown some inclination to introduce elements of thought and thesis over and above story into his work. "The Witching Hour" is the best illustration. One who is in the fifties can scarcely avoid a philosophy of life, and when highly successful, can indulge the luxury on the stage; and this dramatist has added to his appeal by the introduction of stimulating current thought into the framework of stage story. Yet he has shown his craft by cannily preserving the essentials of good dramatic story-telling. Thus, into "The Witching Hour," which is in outline and on the surface simply a good old-fashioned melodrama with pleasant alleviations of humor and sentiment, he has injected the prevalent interest in psychic phenomena and secured thereby a distinctly novel *scene à faire*. This welcome infusion of theory or

thesis is less evident in "As a Man Thinks." And, indeed, it may be said of Mr. Thomas' latest work in general that its alleged philosophic content has been exaggerated and that only in a very mild way can he be called a dramatist of the theatre of ideas. The handling of the theme implied in the title "As a Man Thinks," for example, seems rather half-hearted, and the author's opinion on marital relations evokes a smile in these days of militant feminism. In the later piece, "Mere Man," too, the view of Woman Suffrage is such as to give an interesting play, that lacks unity of purpose apparently, intellectually an old-fashioned air. His chief value would seem to be in his crisp technic, his sympathetic handling of American types, and the frequent wit of his dialogue. Perhaps, when his work is reviewed as a whole, and already it mounts up to over twenty plays, it will be found that a drama like "Arizona," relishably native, and full of wholesome excitement, with its crying up of the American qualities of readiness, humor

and manly sentiment, the action played against a background of the great western spaces, will best sum up his virtues. It is a pity that so few of Mr. Thomas's plays have been published, in these days when publishing has become so common, thereby making impossible that careful examination which their merit frequently deserves.

This is still truer of Mr. Gillette, no one of whose dramas have appeared in print, but his excellences are, in the main, those that, in the familiar phrase, get across the foot-lights. Like Thomas, a finished craftsman, with thirty years or more of theatre experience, as actor, manager and playwright, behind him, he is something more: a writer for the stage who sees life with a sort of laconic clear-sightedness, tempered by a humor that is distinctive and delightful. In estimating his military dramas, it must be remembered that they hold the primacy in the point of time, although Belasco, Howard, and others have essayed the subject with no little success. It is likely, too, that in the final reck-

oning, comedies like "A Legal Wreck," "Too Much Johnson," an adaptation like "The Private Secretary," and so charming a light comedy as "Clarice," with its final touch of melodrama, will come into the decision. Nor should the fact that "Sherlock Holmes" is, in a sense, a free handling of material drawn from fiction, blind one to its originality in the treatment of the story, to say nothing of the technical *tours de force* with which it bristles.

Yet, when all is said, there is a vague feeling of dissatisfaction in respect of Mr. Gillette's work. With his independent viewpoint and professional skill, we have hoped for more work that expressed the maturity of his thought. There is something elusive in his personality; he has never fully revealed himself in his dramatic activity. The failure of his latest (and possibly last) play, "Electricity," was regrettable, for it bore evidences of that more vital interpretation of modern problems which gives drama significance.

Clyde Fitch, a somewhat younger man than these others, though passing first from life's stage, occupies a position among our playwrights that is distinctive, if not unique. Most definitely of his generation, he essayed to do something that is single in effect, while voluminous in content. Fifty plays for one who numbered less than fifty years is certainly a remarkable record. But it would be the cause of suspicion rather than important for us here, were it not that Fitch's work has some qualities deserving of respectful attention. Moreover, in his case, we have the advantage of possessing a good number of the dramas in book form. To the fundamental test of playing value, we can, in respect of some half a dozen pieces or more, add the other test of a thoughtful reading, which, after all, helps to make the reader aware of those constructive virtues as well as virtues of artistic detail, likely to be lost when the drama is only heard. It is, in the long run, as unfair to a drama which is a work of art to see it without a reading, as it

is to read it without seeing it on the boards—in spite of all the practical opinions to the contrary.

Mr. Fitch's distinctive contribution to our stage seems to me to lie in his power of seizing upon certain phases of city life which have to do with the prosperous commercialism resulting in a certain kind of domestic menàge: the family well-to-do, pleasure-loving, wonted to luxury, touched with the fever of getting and spending. With genuine observation, a sympathetic feeling for these types and an instinct for setting them in novel situations, Mr. Fitch has thus, within his limits, been a social historian. He has injured his work again and again by the introduction of forced effects of melodrama, not seldom in bad taste, or by sacrificing psychology for the sake of ending. But in the best examples, like "The Climbers," "Captain Jinks of the Horse Marines," and, above all else, "The Truth," indubitably his finest play, he has carried the idea logically through nor conceded too much to popular

desire. Several of his dramas, of which "The Stubbornness of Geraldine" is one, have also secured amusing material in the comedy of the American Abroad, the possibilities of which in fiction by James and in drama by Howard, had earlier been demonstrated. The best of this type, and a play standing high in the work of Fitch, is "The Girl with the Green Eyes," in which the scene in the art museum is perhaps as good broad comedy as he ever wrote. "The Moth and the Flame" in one scene is a regrettable example of the author's tendency to sacrifice to coarse theatricalism. "The Cowboy and the Lady," agreeable though it be, may stand for an illustration of the made-to-order drama to which Fitch too often yielded. It would be foolish and unfair to depreciate the excellence of character drawing and finish of dialogue with which this playmaker has enriched his social pictures; to say nothing of his skill in the fresh invention of such scenes as that which opens "The Climbers."

If we hesitate to call Fitch a dramatist

rather than a playmaker, it is because he does not seem to be thinking fundamentally about life. His dramas interest as surface manifestations, as character portrayal, effective situation and good story. But they most often disappoint us as a whole, all the more because they are so good in spots, in details. And this is because one does not feel implicit in them that comment upon the human case and that interpretation of man which the world has always found in dramatists to whom a lasting place has been awarded. Fitch's pieces are skilfully told stage stories, having a definite value as social documents, and that is much; but not enough, one feels, to give him the position which at times he so teasingly suggests he might attain.

An excellent example of the difference I have in mind is the author's "The City," loudly hailed as his greatest play when posthumously produced. An exceptionally strong drama in the technical sense, it undoubtedly is; the obligatory scene, to adopt Mr. Archer's phrasing of the French term,

can safely be relied upon in the theatre for half a dozen curtain calls. Yet it is a *coup de théâtre*, rather than a great scene in the higher sense. It is an attack upon the nerves rather than an appeal to the intellect or soul. It is far inferior for this reason to the central scene in Thomas's "The Witching Hour." Moreover, "The City" starts out to be a stimulating discussion of the relative values of town and country life seen in their effect upon a certain family which begins in the one and ends in the other; the title, in fact, implies it. But when once Fitch has knitted his threads into the third-act strand, he is tempted away from the original theme into the brutal melodrama of a scene which from the mere theatric standpoint is the whole purpose of the play. And so his promise is broken and higher unity destroyed for the sake of a bit of effectivism. Artistically, therefore, "The City" is to be rated far below a play like "The Truth," which, I believe, will eventually be placed at the head of all of Fitch's work. It is not

only sound psychologically and brilliantly fine in characterization, but of admirably cumulative constructive skill, and the whole is bathed in a sort of larger sympathy not often found in this playwright, and suggesting his power to leave us drama not only of good technical accomplishment, but interpretive significance. His "Nathan Hale" and "Barbara Frietchie" suggest that with higher aims he might have worthily met the severe demands of romance and tragedy; "Beau Brummel," early in his career, in which he had the assistance of Mansfield, hinted at a talent for historical painting. Fitch wrote too much and too frequently under practical pressure to order. But as it is, three or four of his dramas will always be chosen to represent our achievement in the realistic painting of certain social moods of the day, set in an environment of the New York of the socially ambitious and the idle rich.

To consider other of our dramatic writers whose aim is to make acting plays which

shall truthfully present aspects of the contemporary life, is to confront a welter of names, each season bringing candidates of promise and almost every month some new play that gives the open-minded critic pause, as he wonders if it be not only new but significant, a presage for the future. A few elders detach themselves from the crowd. One such is David Belasco, whose skill in stagecraft and success in all that has to do with stage production has made him easily the doyen in this aspect of theatre activity. Yet, in the long list of dramas with which he has been associated as author, adapter or stage manager, whose deft hand has shaped and set the play to its advantage, very few can lay claim to serious regard. Perhaps "The Return of Peter Grimm" comes closest to justifying the assertion that Mr. Belasco is more than an example of modern wizardry in stage conductment. Its use of the spiritual is effective and in these days of the psychic, it attracts the same sort of interest which was aroused by Mr. Thomas's "The

Witching Hour." Nor, in the hands of so capable a player as David Warfield, is there an offensive suggestion of trick in the details. The story may be taken as a legitimate and pleasing allegory of human influence beyond the grave and the incidental realism in the familiar Belasco manner is not a matter of reproach. It is rare, however, that this master of theatric effects treats life in its essential instead of superficial relations in such wise as to give the auditor the sense that he sincerely cares, and would interpret as well as show. Miss Bradley's "The Governor's Lady" contained an excellent idea in the wife whose husband had socially outgrown her; yet it is the replica of a Childs' restaurant which makes the meretricious appeal of novelty, and there we get the Belasco touch. It is probable that in the minds of that careless public which really supports the playhouse, such plays as "The Rose of the Rancho" and "The Case of Becky" bear quite as truly the Belasco stamp as any of his own creation. Why not, when the bill-boards are as likely

as not innocent of the authors' names, and the audience as it leaves the theatre is vocal over the marvels of scene manipulation? To get a sharp sense of the shortcomings of this brilliant theatre man, one has but to compare him with foreign directors like Reinhardt, Barker and Brahm. With them and their kind we get, besides craft, vision, and along with the appeal to the senses, ideals of the highest.

While Charles Klein has disappointed us of late by the introduction of clap-trap elements into his work, praise is due him as one of the first writers for the stage to utilize the theme of business life for purposes of dramatic story-telling: a theme which Bronson Howard declared a generation ago was properly to be the dominant American motive. He illustrated the statement with so sterling a play as "The Henrietta"; and much later dramas, of which, English or foreign, Mirabeau's "Business Is Business" and Sowerby's "Rutherford and Son," are examples, indicate that this is more than an

American tendency: being, indeed, modern. But Mr. Arnold Bennett never said a truer thing about this country than when he remarked on the romantic, all but lyric regard with which American men view their business. And something of this,—business as an object of worship or an expression of power,—has begun to get into some of our playmaking. Whatever the demerits of a play like "The Lion and the Mouse," it may justly be commended for the use of such a motive in a successful way: the tyranny of finance in relation to human lives is strikingly exhibited with palpable concessions to public taste in the particulars of character drawing and conclusion. Nor should it be denied to the universally liked "Music Master," that a fundamental idea, that of the relation of father and daughter, is seized upon and made lovably sympathetic in a setting which has the unconventional charm of art and poverty and irresponsible youth. The personal triumph of Warfield,—like that of Jefferson in "Rip

Van Winkle,"—confuses the issue, but must not blind us to the independent value of the drama. "The Third Degree," too, melodramatic in both conception and treatment—and there is nothing against melodrama except the monstrosities perpetrated in its name—showed a welcome instinct to use the fresh and picturesque material offered by the underworld of City life—a range of subject-matter now giving alarming evidences of being overworked. But with another drama of business life, "The Gamblers," one noted with perturbation that life was being wrested from truth for the sake of stage effect. Externally, here was admirable realism; few plays in the first act get a firmer grip on an audience. But the deeper truth, which means the faithful portrayal of character acted upon by circumstances, is plainly violated when the sympathy is so shamelessly thrown toward a dishonest man whose kindness to his father covers all his sin; and a government official who is simply doing his unpleasant duty is presented for detestation.

The final bestowal of rewards can but make the judicious grieve. There is in such a drama—and later work by Mr. Klein provokes the same thought—a suggestion of the use of American life for its tempting contrasts of high color and vivid vibration, without the reflection as to its meaning so desirable in a play-maker who would do more than offer temporary entertainment. Let it be said of Mr. Klein, emphatically, that the entertainment is always there; he does not make the mistake of being thoughtful at the expense of amusement.

Among the younger men,—and like these others in the honest endeavor to depict with some degree of truth the aspects of our life and mayhap to comment upon the passing show,—Edward Sheldon has special significance. Still a very young man, Mr. Sheldon has written half a dozen or more plays which for variety, vigor and a kind of exuberance which implies the tentative period of experiment, seem to me big with promise. From the first, he has been a man of the the-

atre in his feeling for situation and the instinct for effects. There is nothing uncertain in his elan and the largeness of his handling: his faults are not those of the niggard or the too subtle. His themes are wholesomely American—naturally, since they interest him most—they show the dramatist's broad sympathies, his hearty liking for the unconventional corner life of social estrays or for the more central scenes of national history. Already, he has sounded serious if but occasional notes of the earnest student of society, and the most sensible prophecy of him at present is to say that he may do notable things in any one of half a dozen directions. Thus, "Salvation Nell," gave a graphic sense of the street work in religion which is perhaps too familiar visually to be comprehended by many who pass by on the other side. "The Nigger," while failing to be a great play, was certainly a strong and enjoyable one, an honest and interesting attempt to display phases of the Southern problem. "The Boss" painted the ward poli-

tician in a manner to make us see his virtues—his vices receive full attention nowadays. Both "Egypt" and "The Princess Zim-Zam" testify to Mr. Sheldon's boyish zest in Bohemian types, and though both were failures, they were by no means lacking in the virile traits we are coming to associate with one who, from his training, can be counted on to get those literary and constructive elements into his work which must be reckoned with in the final estimate. Personally, I feel grateful to Mr. Sheldon for two acts of "The Princess Zim-Zam." It is much to be hoped that the publication of one of his dramas will lead to that of others, in order to a further study of his method and quality. In "The High Road," Mr. Sheldon again uses for his inspiration one of the larger manifestations of national life as it touches private fates: his material seems less distinctively his than with other plays from his hand, but as an essay in dramaturgy, it marks progress in his art. The later play, "Romance," is mentioned in another connection.

In short, here is a young man under thirty, who has invention, the dramatic sense, a trained technic, instinctive Americanism and the courage of his convictions as to subject-matter. He gives the impression of wanting to please himself, because he is deeply interested in life and proposes to express his reaction to it. The prayer to offer up for him, therefore, is that he may not be induced by popularity to trim for manager, actor or public.

Had Eugene Walter written nothing else but "The Easiest Way," he would not be altogether negligible in our dramatic record. It was a play to seize and hold the attention of a general audience; and to make the thoughtful tense. The story was skilfully graduated to a crisis that was at once life and art. It was a brave, sincere study of the type of woman who is light but lovable, weak rather than bad; her history is carried through logically, with no paltering of concession to popular demand. And the drama radiates that kind of tolerant understanding

which is neither mushy sentimentality nor shallow indifference. Hence, it is not only Mr. Walter's most important contribution so far, but one of the very few significant American dramas of the past decade in the field of realism. Had the author maintained this level, he would be in every sense a leader. The resemblance of "The Easiest Way" to Pinero's "Iris" in framework may be pointed out, without any wish to detract from its essential originality.

This playwright has, however, hardly kept the pace. The preceding drama, "Paid in Full," with its melodramatic scene which was out of key with the remainder of the play, bespoke the writer's interest in the exhibition of every-day, unideal metropolitan social conditions: the small clerk in his sordid setting, the kind of thing which George Gissing did so well in fiction. That such a work could, contrary to expectation, win success, suggested Mr. Walter's knack for catching the accent and look of life and his intention of painting in unflattering details. The spec-

tator saw, and said: "Yes, it's just like life," meaning both the size of the flat and the temptation or trial which such life brings the occupants. It was a play arousing hope in the writer's further contribution. "Fine Feathers" can be appreciated in the broad virility of its handling and its desire to present once more certain familiar complications of city life where the lure of money plays havoc with human fate. But in this play, effectivism appears to come first, and the critic asks of the final tragedy, "Has it the same ring of the inevitable which made 'The Easiest Way'?" At present, one watches Mr. Walter with both hope and fear.

Many others are doing work which, taken collectively, deepens the impression of a broader, freer depiction of the fascinatingly variant phases of our social scene. Perhaps, so far, polite society has not been so successfully depicted as the more democratic aspects. Yet the work of Messrs. Langdon Mitchell, Harry Smith and J. M. Patterson in such dramas as "The New York Idea," "Mrs. Bum-

stead Leigh," and "A Little Brother of the Rich" are examples, where more might be adduced, of studies which show real observation of the polite and often unpleasant phases of life in the centres.

Mr. Broadhurst's praiseworthy effort to paint some of the piquant conditions and types of local politics in "The Man of the Hour," the response to which was so cordial, has been extended to include a piece like "Bought and Paid For," where the discussion of the married problem reminds us of Fitch, and the humor gives the salt which savors what otherwise might be too drastic for some. Mr. Patterson's study of newspaper life, "The Fourth Estate," deserves approval for its initial intention to tell the truth and let the ending take care of itself. "Rebellion," too, shows an admirable desire to let the logic of life work itself out in story. Clever farce, sometimes rising to a true comedy vein, is already written by Rupert Hughes, James Forbes, James Montgomery, Mrs. Rinehart, Miss Mayo, Avery Hopwood, and

many others, writers whose technical accomplishment and contact with reality are far in advance of the impossible farcical concoctions of the earlier generation. More serious work has come from Mr. Hughes, who is capable of much if he be not deflected from his best endeavor. "The Man Between" justifies the statement. Mr. Buchanan's "The Cub" was a distinctly promising achievement in the way of satiric comedy; and so was Mr. Barry's "The Upstart." The supercilious mental attitude of patronage toward farce as a form is to be deprecated. There is nothing against it, if it be not unskilful and silly. It can be included in our enjoyment of the theatre whenever it is clean and well done, for it implies the objective treatment of the fun of life expressed in the complications of circumstance, character being subsidiary to that result. Mr. Channing Pollock has shown an expert hand in dramatizations of fiction like "The Pit" and "In the Bishop's Carriage," and his "The Little Gray Lady," to mention one of a number of plays clever

in idea or keen in particulars of characterization, seemed to some of us the right use of excellent material. The sympathetic touch in Edward Peple's "The Prince Chap" and "The Littlest Rebel," is used in the service of the kind of truth-telling which includes a feeling for the romantic possibilities of life. Mr. J. Hartley Manners is exhibiting a sense of stage values in dramas that if more American in motive might enrich the native study. The popular "Peg o' My Heart," if conventional in conception, lacks neither skill nor unstrained pleasantness of tone. Mrs. Sutherland, Beulah Dix, Martha Morton, Grace Furniss, Marguerite Merington, Rida Johnson Young and Rachel Crothers have done work of varying merit, but sometimes on a high plane of craftsmanship, the fresh, first-hand observation in Miss Crothers's "Three of Us" and the vital feeling in "A Man's World" calling for special mention.

In the one-act form, the cultivation of which is now rapidly developing in this country, nothing better has been done than

Miss Dix's "Dramatic Interludes." Women, in fact, are beginning to do a service in drama analogous to that they have long performed for fiction: namely, to bring to social observation the light touch and the surer knowledge necessary for the verity of the picture, and at the same time, to command more insight into the psychology of the sex. A conservative tendency, natural enough, has often checked the playwrights among them in this respect, so that as yet they have not risen to their full opportunity.

Those veterans of fiction, Messrs. Wilson and Tarkington, have brought considerable technical skill and a pleasingly romantic Americanism to the stage, and their humor is delightful: the popular "Man from Home," if unfair to the Europeans who serve as foils to the main purpose of the play, hits off a certain western type veraciously: and perhaps unwittingly draws the attention away from other dramas of a finer strain by these authors;—for example, "Your Humble Servant," Mr. W. C. De Mille, with his Belasco

training, has in the romantic "Strongheart" and the realistic "The Woman" shown a sincerity along with skill which leads one to have an eye on all he does. Certain writers of unquestionable gift and other than commercial standards, like Knoblauch and Tully, with their tendency toward the more imaginative rendering of material, may be studied to more advantage in a chapter devoted to such writers, with the word Romance as a unifying denominator.

The lively play-making of a George Ade may not be entirely overlooked for its youthful dash and that power to reproduce homely scenes and characters with the keen appreciation of current idiom: nor will the catholic-minded observer fail to note that in his "Broadway Jones" Mr. Cohan gives plain proof of adding truth of observation to a recognized faculty for dialogue and characterization. The rapidity of his movement makes depth out of the question; but so far as he goes, it were foolish to refuse to see the value of such pictures. With Ameri-

canism as a key-note, indeed, much of the work that at first blush might be classed as purely ephemeral, is felt to have its merit in chronicling the native life. Mr. Howells had the courage to point out years ago the significance in this way of Harrigan's Irish plays. In the same way, these later attempts should be considered with the sympathy which looks forward hopefully to a genuine drama in the United States. To say this, is not to forget that we must have the chemical union of observation, skill and imagination in dramatic work to attain the highest results. Yet a tentative period of promise needs, above all, sensible, clear-sighted encouragement.

It is a welcome sign that managers like Mr. Miller, Mr. Brady and Mr. Tyler are discovering young dramatists of quality and producing their work. Such far-sighted courage will appreciably affect the situation in time.

Many names, but no movement? Hardly a fair way of putting it. When the observer is too close to the movement he may not see

it move. At any rate, tendencies there certainly are,—and this of closer observation and a keener conscience in the study of humanity, is obviously among them. If the truth without be aimed at more than the truth within, and the realism still seem shallow, the gain is visible to the watchful eye.

The frequency with which plays now get their first hearing outside New York is also a sign of health. Only a few years ago, the Metropolitan dominance in this matter was absolute: drama was made or marred on Broadway. But success that began in Chicago or Los Angeles comes to plays like "The Man from Home," "The Melting Pot," "The Bird of Paradise" and "Peg o' My Heart," and this suggestion that the country at large has an opinion and that it counts, cannot but be a good thing for our dramatic interest. Managers are in the way of saying that worthy drama financially unsuccessful in the Metropolis made up its losses in the large western cities. No one city should decide the fortunes of a play.

Such recent plays as "The Havoc," "The

Rainbow" and "Kindling" illustrate the likelihood that each season may bring forth good work that sends the critic at once on the author's trail: it is the frequency of these arrivals that stimulates the critic.

Again, the steadily growing unwillingness to accept foreign plays rather than those of home manufacture—not so much because of the trade-mark as for the simple reason that, other things equal, they are less interesting or less understood—is significant and must operate to aid the new school. To be sure, when a type of play deeply indigenous, like that shown us by the Irish players, visits these shores, it awakens the interest among intelligent theatregoers that its beauty and sincerity deserve. But even British conditions differ enough from our own to make the American restive and not too cordial to Jones and Pinero. A generation ago, he meekly accepted the foreign play. But now, with a sense of the appealing material at home, and with more power of discrimination between the offerings, he is in the way of in-

difference or coldness to the play from abroad—unless superlative excellence overrides the objections. Dramatists of commanding position—Jones, Pinero, Wilde, Galsworthy, Bennett, Shaw—receive moderate applause, if they attract at all: if Shaw be an exception here, so he is in everything. The triangle from Paris with its tiresome iteration upon the one jangling note, has plainly ceased to allure. Very few managers cling to the mistaken assumption that the success of Berlin, Paris or London means the same result in New York. We are interested more and more in our own social conditions, and while nothing human should be alien from our sympathy, yet there is no reason why we should be stirred to the depths by a stage story the premises to which are well-nigh inconceivable. Our better critics are forming the habit of plain speaking against that worst result of foreign importation, the attempt to doctor plays to suit what is fondly believed to be American taste. The issue being amorphous and neuter, the audi-

ences by rejecting such spurious stuff, are giving evidence of spontaneous if not self-conscious criticism. The very life of a play and that which alone gives it worth, if it have any, is bound up with its local color and also with its point of view. To change characters or scene is to change the meaning: to change the ending is total damnation, ethical and artistic. We are learning this and judging drama accordingly. Authors who permit this are actuated by commercial motives, tradesmen not artists. Why should Americans, for example, be asked to take great interest in a French play the plot of which is based squarely upon the marriage of convention, when the facts do not correspond with those in the United States at all as they are known to the public which supports the playhouse as an institution? Why should the wife in Bataille's "The Foolish Virgin," who guards from encroachment the "sacred" room wherein her husband and his paramour are hiding, be an heroic rather than a ridiculous figure when im-

ported overseas? Anatol, no doubt, is a recognizable type—to a Little Theatre audience: but he belongs there. Elizabeth Baker's "Chains" was doctored for American use: Githa Sowerby's "Rutherford and Son" was not. They happen to illustrate, synchronously, the right and wrong way in this matter.

This is not to deny that we need European drama to teach us many things and that this is a cosmopolitan time in the exchange of dramatic, as other commodities. Drama that, beyond boundary lines, presents the bosom interests of mankind, will always be welcome. "The Servant in the House" suffered no harm from being English in setting; "The Typhoon" got its hearing, albeit foreign in locale and types. Nevertheless, drama, like charity, must begin at home: we should take our technic from abroad, not our themes. Not otherwise will a worthy native Theatre be built up.

It is the advantage and at the same time the pitfall of the American playwright to-

day that his material is so much more picturesque and diverse than that of England, for instance; the advantage has been pointed out by Mr. Jones, Mr. Bennett and other makers of literature. But the temptation is to reproduce the surface effects, and neglect the more thoughtful, elusive causes behind the passing manifestation. Mr. Moses in his recent book on "The American Dramatist" has spoken of the newspaper quality of so much of the work,—the hunt for head-line subjects. That there is something in this, may be conceded. But it must not be over-emphasized. Sleazy and scamped production, so familiar to the student of the Elizabethan play, is sure to follow the practical pressure put upon playwrights to supply the too numerous theatres; the threat of the moving pictures too is likely to cheapen the quality of the work. But as I have tried to suggest in the review of these truth-tellers, our dramatists are at least beginning to think for themselves, independently, honestly. It is a question of artistic conscience, and in any

age or land, it is the few comparatively who have it. Even an Arnold Bennett or a Chesterton, it may be guessed,—and who would deny to either of them the courage of his convictions and a refusal to be led?—may well be imagined as producing more “copy” than if the editors left them alone.

The sudden shifts and startling contrasts which make our native life so attractive are naturally first exhibited in an objective form like the drama: the psychology will come—or rather, is already being studied and offered, timidly as yet, if you will. It is wise to bear down upon this with a sort of reasonable optimism of mood.

And the skill necessary for the artistic representation of truth in the native field is fast being acquired. The change in technic is as thorough-going as the change in aim and view-point: this must be amplified in the next chapter.

V

TECHNIC

THE late Richard Mansfield, asked to express the difference between the stage of the past and that of the present, replied laconically with the single word: "Light!" He meant, of course, to make a comparison between the modern system of lighting the theatre and that which it superseded, the theatre that was ill-lighted or, from the later point of view, not lighted at all. As a result, the expressional work of the actor can to-day be clearly seen; where once language was needed to explain the course of the story, the slightest motion or facial change takes its place. Fundamentally, modern play-making substitutes action for word, and in this sense is less "literary" than it once was. The word, waiting on the action and scene, has become secondary; yet, paradox as it sounds, is even more important than ever, because each word

must be right and none can be wasted. The 'would-be critic who sapiently declares that plays are now no longer literature, really means this, more than anything else: he nurses the old-time mannerisms that distinguish book-talk from life. Modern technic has sternly cut down the language of drama to what is dramatic: the ornamental, the marginal-philosophic, the discursive have been compressed or entirely abjured, for the sake of the clean-cut use of idiom that reveals character and advances story. This is the tendency and resulting type, with whatever variations due to different genres or a reaction against a too tyrannous insistence on dramatic concision.

With the reproduction of life as our aim and ideal (meaning life as seen by the eye), and a desire to give upon the stage a sense of the broken rhythm of life, instead of the more perfect rhythm of art, the play has come to show men and women in their habits, as they are in their accustomed daily pursuits and pleasures, in dress, speech, setting

and action, fellow creatures like ourselves, in the mere recognition of whom, for the spectator, lies a source of gratification. And all that by its unnaturalness blurs this recognition, the playwright strives to remove. He has pretty well eliminated the aside and looks unfriendly on the soliloquy, those useful though disillusionizing devices of earlier dramaturgy. He has remorselessly got rid of subsidiary characters unless they are vital to the story; character which, of old, swelled the number of speaking parts and ran up the pay-roll to alarming figures. He has cut down the *dramatis personæ* to a few necessary folk, four or five, six, eight, ten, as the case may be, who are sufficient to carry one of the typically intense psychologic complications which the modern play à la Ibsen chooses as its favorite motive.

Instead of many scenes and five acts, the play we have in mind—the play of advanced workmanship—using the motives which call for such a form, reduces the number of acts to four, more often to three, and not seldom

unfolds the whole story in the one scene, with no change of setting at all. In the same way and for the same reason, the unity of time, as well as that of place, is observed in its more liberal interpretation; if the action be not confined to a single day, it is compressed within the brief limits of a very *few* days—sometimes within but a few hours. This is no self-conscious, pedantic return to Greek methods, but simply the result of the nature of the particular kind of drama. Seize upon a psychological situation in its central and climactic moment, and then dramatize it, and logically you will use a few characters acting and acted upon for a short time in a specific place. Making so much of this supreme moment, it follows naturally, too, that the exposition, formerly conducted in a most leisurely fashion, and with little attempt to hide its use from the audience, is now minimized and introduced far more cunningly, in order that the antecedent conditions may be plausible even to a sophisticated ear and eye. A study of Ibsen in his development with this

matter of exposition in mind, will throw light upon the way he attained to mastery in exposition and left the stage of his time a superior method in this, as in all else that pertains to craftsmanship. Again, the actor who traditionally has half addressed the audience when reality demanded that he speak to those on the stage, has come more and more to ignore the "front" and by word and attitude to produce the effect of really talking to his fellow characters. This approach to reality has been carried so far that an artist like Mrs. Fiske at times turns her back squarely to the audience and talks up-stage; or Robert Lorraine in "Man and Superman" sits astride a chair and delivers an important speech, while the spectator studies the cut of his coat behind. Those familiar with French technic are aware that the French player talks to his audience where the English or American actor simulates in his dialogue the more direct relation to the persons of the play.

In the matter of scenery, the change is

equally great. The box set of to-day may be taken to stand for the general revolution which makes the illusion of the proscenium arch so wonder-working, serving ends so widely apart from those secured by the platform stage of Shakspeare, that of the Restoration Theatres with their still ample space beyond the curtain, and the Drury Lane type of house a century later, which still suggests the older model. It is this approximation to "life" which makes the knowing theatre-goer smile when he witnesses some famous piece of the past—a "Caste" or "Camille"—perhaps still vital in the essentials of good story, fine character drawing and stimulating interpretation, but so hopelessly artificial in method and manner as to seem the product of another world. The easy way to keep one's reverence for such drama intact, is not to see a performance of it, to say which is no reflection upon its worth, but merely a statement of the inevitable fate of any work of art which represents an outworn mode, if it be sharply contrasted with the mode that suc-

ceeds it. And in the case of drama, the change is fundamental. Its function is ever to show the age its form and pressure; sensitively does it respond to every wind that blows, and, above all, it bends to and obeys the Time-spirit.

As a matter of course, the actor's art has changed with the general change,—the altered stage, the more accurate reproduction of the human scene,—and it were folly to blame him if, figuratively speaking, to-day he refuses to use the buskin and tragic mask (save in the unusual kind of drama that calls for them), and insists on throwing his work into the low key of naturalness and the gray tints of every-day life.

Heartily conceding all this, and as heartily approving it, it is not amiss to sound a note of warning. Drama, after all, is a form of art and for that reason involves some artifice, as each and every art does. What our time, therefore, has done is not to exclude it, but to refine it into a kind of artifice less palpably artificial. There has been a ten-

dency in some of the progressive technic of the day, to go on the practical assumption that all the difference between art and life can be eliminated if sufficient skill be used: which is undesirable, impossible and absurd. An artistic convention that can never be done away with in the theatre, for example, is the removal of the fourth wall that the auditors may see the action. Yet, in Jerome's "The Passing of the Third Floor Back," one of the characters warms his hands at an imaginary fireplace at the footlights. This is surely a mistake. It makes more demand by far upon the spectator's imagination to assume the fireplace, than it does to concede the absence of the fourth wall,—a concession to which he has become quite accustomed. There is a good deal to say for the purely symbolic use of scenery; and late experience in reviving the medieval drama, or imitating it, the staging of such an interesting stage material as "The Yellow Jacket" by Messrs. Hazleton and Benrimo, and the advanced teachings of Gordon Craig, Max Reinhardt,

Granville Barker and other leaders, have broadened our views in this interesting field. It remains true, nevertheless, that the hands of the dramatic clock cannot be set back several centuries arbitrarily and all the gains involved in the modern development ignored. So far as this is a reaction against the ideal of scenery for scenery's sake, it is welcome; but when it forgets the instinct of the modern theatre-goer for congruity, the sophisticated demand for a closer agreement between the imitation and the thing imitated, it goes too far and becomes academic rather than practical. Acknowledge the omitted fourth wall, and make us forget it,—that would seem to be sound advice to the playwright.

In the same way, in the attempt to make the dialogue "natural," to reduce the key so far as to make the words inaudible half way back in the house, and to minimize makeup because it, too, is "unnatural," with a result of pale ineffectiveness, implies a failure to grasp the very purpose of art, which is that seeming-true only to be secured

by the proper heightening of the effects of life. Even in the often admirably imitative broken effects of modern dialogue, with its incomplete sentences, its interruptions and overlappings, there is danger that the pattern become ravelled so that a want of intelligibility may follow. No good dialogue, no matter how realistic its purpose, can afford to imitate too closely without peril in the consequence. No Zolaesque conversation can reproduce the speech of the gutter and bagnio, for obvious reasons. And the remark applies equally to imitation in general. Here we encounter the snare of modern technic in the unimaginative delineation of so-called truth in our photographic playwrights. It is a commonplace to point to the advantage of the Elizabethan audience over our own in that appeal to the imagination which wanes from disuse when the illusion behind the proscenium arch does all the work for it. Very helpful in reminding us of this, is the now frequent revival of plays of more primitive methods, not to seek

their installation, which is impossible, but for their suggestion to the theatre-goer that the mind and soul, as well as the eye and ear, are involved in the dramatic experience.

An effective use of simple hangings and a more artistic manipulation of lights, the work of a Reinhardt or a Platt may assist to imaginative appreciation as never can the most expensive conventional settings. The directors of our Little Theatres, with their limited stage areas and restricted financial means, are teaching us this lesson as they purvey the intimate modern drama or that of the past.

The modern wish to secure the effect of naturalness at any cost, has led the latter-day technician, among other things, to lean away from the too-neat constructional devices of the Scribe-Sardou school and to insist on Nature at the expense of artifice. This can be seen, among other denotements, in the matter of curtains. Where before, there was the formally composed picture and the crescendo moment of emotional excitement, as likely as not now the scene ends

with scarcely an extra stress of emphasis. Instead of the conventional half-circle of actors, ready to bow their acknowledgment of the applause, people go on or off the scene as the occasion demands, and Life dictates. The artificial ensemble at the curtain begins to look odd. The plays ends much as life would end the situation under the circumstances. There is also beginning to be shown a new attitude toward the entr'acte and the implied break in the course of the story. The several parts of the play reduced, as I have noted, to briefer time limits, are drawn closer and closer together and the division is more for the auditor's relaxation than for the purpose of representing the passage of time. Thus, "The Servant of the House" is an example of the closer-knit play: after the curtain it resumes the action exactly where it left it in the preceding act. This tendency toward a unification of the act divisions may be hardly perceptible as yet, but in a few years hence it will be more apparent, I think. And it may be surmised

that the gradual coming of the one-act form into greater favor in this country (it was accepted earlier in England and Europe), will have a distinct influence in the simplification of the longer play.

Already, dramatic sketches of some artistic and technical value are to be seen on the vaudeville stage. And on the stage legitimate, playhouses like the Little Theatres of New York, Philadelphia and Chicago, the Fine Arts Theatre of the latter city and the Toy Theatre in Boston, are familiarizing American audiences with dramatic composition that takes from fifteen minutes to an hour for presentation. The small, intimate auditorium with its atmosphere establishing a sort of *entente cordiale* between actors and audience, makes this possible and must in time help to evolve a definite dramatic genre. The one-act drama written by Beulah Dix, George Middleton, Percy Mackaye, and Richard Harding Davis—to mention only these—may be set down as pioneer serious work in this hopeful direction. Even at the

risk of eccentricity, I must express a personal preference for a play, of whatever length, which is played straight through, after the Shakspearean fashion.

Such presentation is not the cause of the weariness sure to follow when I am asked to detach myself from the stage story and sit in a hot and crowded place, the boredom aggravated by an attempt on the part of the orchestra to make audible the saccharine. Let me testify that the shortest evening in the theatre I ever experienced was in hearing the "Antigone" of Sophocles enacted without interruption by Margaret Anglin and her company, in the Greek Theatre at Berkeley, California. It is well to remind the student that the curtain was introduced because of the exigency of scene shifting, and when the change of scene does not involve time (either because no other setting is called for by the play or because of the use of the double stage), there is no logical reason for retaining the entr'acte, though it is so firmly grounded a tradition. The harbinger of what may be

expected in time to come can be seen now in the Little Theatre in New York, where Mr. Ames, by the use of the device of the double stage, is able to play a piece through with but one wait, during which the audience passes to a room where light refreshments are served. In a four-act play, three acts are practically continuous and the saving in time is perceptible, so that the play may begin proportionately later and thus allow of more time to dine before the theatre. This is a matter for the specialist, no doubt, of small interest to theatre-goers in general; yet they would be practically benefited, I believe, by the change and the two hours' traffic of the stage would then be more than an historical reference. At least, the consideration is one not to be ignored in our fast evolving dramatic technic. The establishment of The Princess Theatre in New York, the first to devote itself exclusively to one-act pieces, is an indication of the increasing interest in this sort of drama, the possibilities of which are but just beginning to be realized.

This reshaping of the drama to-day is altogether welcome, with its freer experimentation and plastic adaptation to the subject matter, method and actual physical demands of the new theatre, and already, as a result, the play is becoming an instrument of story-telling infinitely more effectual in certain ways, and in its best specimens is offering work that deserves the name of literature in any fair definition of that much-tortured word. It is time to drop the narrow and conventional use of the term which denies to an able drama by Fitch, Thomas, Sheldon or Kennedy any literary quality: meaning thereby the flowers of rhetoric, and a kind of bookish speech which defeats the aim, which is, the reproduction of society as it now exists. A play of skilful exposition, firm constructive handling, genuine characterization, mastery of suspense and climax, and all the elements devoted to the interpretation of life in a thought-compelling story and in language that fits the persons of the play as the glove the hand, rising and falling in con-

sonance with their mental and emotional experiences, such a piece may be as truly a worthy contribution to letters as the lyrico-tragic work of a Euripides or the rhetorico-spectacle drama of a Shakspeare. Ibsen is literature, even as those earlier masters. The fact that the words spoken do not suggest print (though they must in the end bear the test of the printed page) is a virtue, not a blemish. Other times, other customs. We have another kind of life to present and must perforce present it in another way: the new drama will faithfully mirror the new interests and the despised Present will in due time become, it may be, the revered "literary" Past. Nothing does the drama more harm in this, its tentative period of lusty youth, than the talk of those misguided enthusiasts who insist on confusing an absence of metaphors and recondite allusion with an absence of literary merit. We must redefine literature to include these more direct renderings of life.

It were quite as truly a mistake, how-

ever, to leave no room in modern play making for the high effects of poetry and the choice of such romantic motives as inevitably qualify the manner of play which expresses them. Just as it is foolish to bring an accusation of unliterary against the type of drama represented by "The Great Divide" and "The Easiest Way," so is it folly to deny to plays like "The Piper" the poetic form and imaginative manipulation of material which are called for by the thought and subject-matter of the author. This phase of the American contribution, promising already and vital with activity, will be discussed in the following chapter. Suffice it to say here that it involves some most important questions concerning which there is much divergence of opinion: are verse plays still legitimate, can drama that deals with the life within rather than the life without depart radically from the usual principles of sound dramaturgy;—does a frank use of allegory and of supernatural agencies violate the ideals which modern theatre con-

ditions are formulating? These and other problems call for discussion when we turn to the attempt to exhibit upon the stage the vision that is beauty and the joy that is more than of the day.

VI

ROMANCE

THE protean word Romance, applied to such forms of story-telling as fiction and drama, indicates at least two quite different attitudes in the portrayal of life: on the one hand, the presentation of the more exciting aspects of the human show—and on the other, the exhibition of the more heroic, idealistic and poetic aspects of human character. The one emphasizes sensation and plot, the other, while often sympathetic to story value and dramatic situation, cares most for such accent upon the evolution of human beings as shall remind the world of the nobler issues of living. These two tendencies give us, in fiction, stories like the Sherlock Holmes series, *et id omne genus*, and in contrast, Hawthorne's "The Scarlet Letter." Looking to current play-making, the distinction marks the difference between "Within

the Law" and "The Servant in the House." That there is an inextinguishable liking on the part of theatre-goers for plays which, viciously or innocently, minister to the appetite for excitement—stage stories of stirring, high-colored content so handled as to suggest that life is more than vegetation—is one of the most obvious lessons of the time. To declare that farce, which is the romance of humorous plot, and melodrama, where plot is first and characterization and message secondary, are necessarily bad and signs of the degeneracy of the modern stage, is to be academic in the worst sense.

Technical skill of a high order, invention, able characterization and, not impossibly, a distinct ethical quality may all be found in melodrama of the better class, in plays like McClellan's "Leah Kleschna," to name but one. There are melodramatic features, in this sense, in so high and spiritual a play as Mr. Mackaye's "The Scarecrow," and it is all the better stage material because of them.

In the lighter and lower meaning of the word, however, the romance in dramatic form is so popular, so ubiquitous and insistent, following the line of least resistance, that it is but natural it should be overdone. All who follow current drama are aware that at present, the theatres are suffering from a surfeit of so-called crook plays, good, bad and indifferent, and the insatiable public taste for such pabulum inevitably has its result in a confusion of standards, both artistic and ethical.

Superficially viewed, such dramas as "The Deep Purple," "Alias Jimmy Valentine," "The Greyhound," "Within the Law," "Blackbirds," "The Argyle Case," "The Conspiracy"—the name is legion—seem very much of a piece; in reality, there is the difference between them which marks the dramatist's danger: the falsification of character for the sake of situation, sensation, plot. There will always be patrons of dramatic entertainment to applaud the play-maker who, as Stevenson whimsically declared of Barrie's "Lit-

tle Minister," lie so delightfully about their puppets. But an honorable minority at least must protest at the slaughter of life for the sake of effectivism. The tendency to use the underworld of great cities as stage material is no doubt stimulated by the present exposures familiar to all newspaper readers. But the demand for this more elementary, not to say elemental, romance is steadily a human preference, quite aside from any current access of interest. "Take us out of ourselves," cries that hypothetical person, the average play-goer. "Give us to realize that life is livelier than we see it in our daily treadmill, and we shall not be too critical as to your means of bringing this about. Indeed, you may fib about life, if you choose, so long as you amuse us with your high-colored human exhibit. Even the penny dreadful is better than the gray do-nothingism of the thesis play." The great success of such an old-fashioned and purely external melodrama as "The Whip" certainly points the moral that there

will always be an audience for plot in the primitive sense.

Here is the danger referred to. To sentimentalize the criminal, to show him as an epitome of all the virtues, while his way of living is subversive of general social interests, is surely bad citizenship on the dramatist's part quite as truly as, and more destructively than, if he ran off with another man's wife. It makes for uneasiness to reflect upon the influence of such character drawing upon the young and unformed—the major part of all theatre audiences. In condemning the types of which the debonair Raffles may stand as an exemplar, one must clearly distinguish them from other portrayals where, as in the person of Sherlock Holmes, the hero is corrective of crime, or a Leah Kleschna turns her back upon it and sets her feet upon the street that is called strait. Also, to do justice to this lurid melodrama of the Newgate tradition, it is necessary to admit that even along with the regrettable

and often absurd representation of evil life as if it were desirable or admirable, there is not seldom to be found an honest sympathy with the derelicts of society merely as human beings, and human beings perhaps for whose degradation society is largely responsible: the creations we enjoy in "The Pigeon" and "Passers-By." This sentiment, so common in present melodrama, is but part of the wider altruistic movement of the day which has enriched the fiction, poetry and drama of our time. Literary art is studying man in the three progressive view-points of human, humane and humanitarian, as Mr. Galsworthy has so happily said. Not to see the good in all this, is to be purblind to the spirit of the age. But it remains true that many plays of the moment are not to be taken seriously as works of art and, because they are lightly taken, do distinct harm as attempts at dramaturgy and pictures of life. True, the usual melodrama of this sort is better decidedly than its prototype a generation ago. There is a far closer approxima-

tion to the facts of human existence, the primary colors of black and white are no longer used to distinguish the villain from the hero and some care is taken to establish a relation between motive and act, cause and effect. Virtue is no longer allowed to triumph so surely in this dramatic vale of tears, nor is vice denied its puzzling successes in this world. So much may be set down on the side of gain—to which it may be added that the level of technic is assuredly higher.

There is little need of alarm over the present excessive cultivation of this kind of play. Excess destroys itself by overemphasis and motives other than those of criminology will contest this popularity by a natural, indeed, inevitable reaction. It is already obvious that the tendency to impart to life in a drama the livelier qualities of interest and excitement, is not confined to the rather primitive type of melodrama which deals with the law breaker, whether in big business circles or the humbler walks of misdoing. Many of

our leading playwrights,—Sheldon, Walter, Broadhurst, De Mille, Armstrong, Thomas,—infuse vigor into their social studies by a frank use of the more sensational elements of human existence. If Bronson Howard was right in his remark a generation ago that business life was properly to be the dominant theme for dramatic purposes, it must be understood that business is more than a humdrum interest either as viewed by the man of affairs himself or seen in its epic sweep and potentialities by the onlooker. With the business man it is often a passion, an end in itself, almost a thing of lyrical appeal. Mr. Arnold Bennett's acute remark that in the United States a man's business has a touch of poetry for him in contrast with the Englishman's feeling about it has been referred to. As a result, plays which deal with such themes, like Klein's "The Lion and the Mouse," or Walter's "Fine Feathers," with the connective tissues of politics and society, have more of color, movement and suspense than might be expected

from their subject-matter. The problems to-day of monopoly and trusts, federal control, interstate laws, labor vs. capital, currency and the tariff, and any or all of these as they touch the fate of the industrial worker or the human being in his social relations, are capable of epic treatment and offer fine material, when rightly handled, to the dramatist of our transitional time; and he is beginning to give them forth in terms of romance as well as of grayer actuality. The more truthful use of material does not prevent such a feeling for imaginative and emotional effects as to make the dramas suitable entertainment for general audiences. When one criticises the introduction in a so-called realistic play of a melodramatic or romantic note, it is not justly so much a verdict against the point of view as the airing of a conviction that it is out of place; in a different key, and hence inartistic.

Perhaps the theme, so lending itself to countless ramifications, that at present seems even more fruitful than that of business life

is that which deals with the freedom of the individual, economic, social or political, with woman naturally the centre of interest. Within our generation she has been and is undergoing a triple revolution in these particular aspects of the common life. She is no longer the same as wife, mother, wage-earner, and citizen. And although at present her political enfranchisement would seem the burning question, when it is settled, as it soon will be, the political phases of her new life will be seen as one facet of that general evolution of the sex into social freedom in the broadest sense. In all this, surely, lies magnificent possibilities for the play writer of democratic sympathy and thoughtful observation. The romance of social passion makes its claim to-day; social passion, the altruistic interest in others for the good of the whole, when it is honestly and deeply felt, cannot but add an emotional value to our art product and must widen to include romance. Dramatists who do not realize this, recognize its value for stage treatment,

and feel inspired by its sensational stimulation, quite fail to grasp an opportunity. But it is encouraging to note that even in the simpler, more obvious kind of romance I am considering, glimpses of this appreciation may be detected. In such a play as Mr. De Mille's "The Woman," there is a serious suggestion of woman's significance in our daily maelstrom of labor and social activity which marks the work as an advance, not only technically, but intellectually, on the conventional picturesqueness of the earlier "Strongheart"; although the tendency to trim for immediate effect is still visible. So too Mr. Sheldon's "The High Road" (mentioned in considering the realistic drama), is an object-lesson in what can be done to link woman's individual destiny in this day of broader chance and judgment, with large public matters; and the remark applies in some measure to Mr. Patterson's "Rebellion," where the vexed problem of divorce is set forth in an individual instance of compelling interest. Mr. Sheldon's latest play at the

present writing, with its challenging title of "Romance," is a good illustration of how these genres inevitably blend in the hands of a modern writer of vigorous imagination. By setting his scene in the perspective of time, using the devices of prologue and epilogue, a certain romantic effect is secured; while the central scene of temptation and spiritual triumph between clergyman and actress has the familiar realism, yet it is romantic both in its full-blooded emotionalism and its conquering of the call of the flesh. This piece strengthens the feeling already expressed that here is a dramatist whose mind plays freely and without dictation over the material offered the stage by our day and by human nature. In these and many other dramas which will occur to every intelligent play-goer, the drama of mere external excitement merges into that deeper romantic conception which involves character study and a comprehension of the vital flow of American life. ✂

The romantic possibilities of scene and

atmosphere, the appeal of the exotic and the faraway are also coming to be realized, and some promising playwrights find their opportunity here. The work of Mr. Tully belongs here, as does that of Eleanor Gates (Mrs. Tully), whose "The Poor Little Rich Girl" is an excellent example of the way in which the psychology of dreams may be skilfully blended with homely realism and social satire to make a popular play. Drama like Mr. Tully's "The Rose of the Rancho" and "The Bird of Paradise," by the use of attractive backgrounds and the more primitive or unconventional types, as well as by emphasis upon high-colored incident and action, deserves an honorable place among our hopeful recent native playmaking. It means better things, come or coming, in American dramaturgy. The second play shows decided advance on the first in grasp, breadth and strength, and Mr. Tully's writing by no means lacks in literary flavor, judging as one must in the case of unpublished material, by the quick testimony of

the ear in the playhouse. One may especially commend the manner in which "The Bird of Paradise" carries through its tragic theme with no paltering for effect, so that the key remains throughout beautifully tonal. On the side of romance, we need just such play-making to build up an American theatre. The unusual critical and popular approval given to "The Yellow Jacket" by two American playwrights, one of them an actor of experience, whose hobby had long been the Chinese theatre, proves that in proportion as our dramatists go farther afield and have the courage of their convictions, the native stage will be enriched and broadened by these refreshingly unconventional experiments. We have not had a more convincing illustration of the value of the stage symbol still to awaken the imagination deadened by a surfeit of scenery. The response to the exotic note struck by such work, and further evidenced by recent plays like "The Garden of Allah," "The Daughter of Heaven," "Bella Donna," "Kismet," and "Joseph and His

Brethren" (though most of these are of other than American manufacture), is teaching us that audiences will surely react from a too exclusive attention to insistent social satire, and desires to enjoy, from time to time, an irresponsible and sportive imaginative mood for its own sake.

Mr. Austin Strong is a young romanticist in the drama whose work is refreshingly away from realism in the narrow sense. His one-act piece, "A Little Father of the Wilderness," so admirably played by Francis Wilson, was a delightful example of the imaginative handling of historic material, and "The Toy-Maker of Nuremberg" possessed rare charm of sympathy and poetic feeling. It is, I believe, a play that will yet come into its own of general favor. The author's treatment of the Rip Van Winkle motive was also significant in showing his romantic bent and willingness to make use of alluringly stimulating native subject-matter. It is dramatic writing that may well be hopefully watched.

Edward Knoblauch is one of the younger

writers who takes advantage of this authentic mood among those who visit the playhouse. His work is refreshingly eclectic, including dramas so widely apart as "The Shulamite," "Milestones" (in collaboration with Mr. Bennett), "The Faun" and "Kismet." "The Faun," with its imaginative fantasy which embodies an enjoyable satire on social conventions, and "Kismet" with its amoral feeling for high colored adventuresomeness, are especially illustrative of the genre in mind. Range, diversity and the spirit of experimentation, together with adequate skill, make such dramatic writing promising in a comparatively new playwright.

Nothing could be farther from the truth than to proceed on the assumption that one particular sort of play is demanded to-day. Theatre-goers have plainly indicated their eclecticism in this regard. Nor is there any reason why this often merely external romance cannot deepen congruously into the romance of human psychology. The submergence of story in scenery is the obvious danger in

this kind of romantic writing; but with the proper blend of elements such drama is thoroughly worth while. Messrs. Tarkington and Wilson in their collaborative efforts have a tendency to introduce a kindly romanticism of character, incident or setting which takes us back to Dickens, and although not so deep as a well, nor so wide as a church door, at least offers innocent amusement in the House dedicated, among other aims, to pleasure. It is as easy to sneer at plays like "Cameo Kirby" and "Your Humble Servant," as it is at Cohan's farce comedy, or, earlier, Hoyt's lively sallies into the humorous phases of American common life. Aristophanes, to a contemporary eye, may have looked as unliterary as a Hoyt or Harrigan to-day. But it is likely that the future grave historian will point to all this manner of dramatic writing as part and parcel of the social painting in letters which exhibits the Time.

So, too, Eugene Walter, in the main sternly a realist, in "The Wolf" illustrates his sense of the legitimate melodrama that

lies, still largely perdu, in the great frozen region of the north; the kind of material made attractively familiar in Sir Gilbert Parker's short stories. The west is frequently used in the tradition of Bret Harte and its romantic possibilities exploited; Mr. Armstrong in several plays, of which "The Heir to the Hoorah" is typical, and Mr. Moody in "The Great Divide," offer illustrations; and the constant dramatizing of romantic fiction, native and foreign, is part of the same tendency: "M'liss," "The Pit," "Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch," are but variants of this principle, and it may be added that the entirely proper prejudice against the book play as not presumably begotten of a deep artistic impulse, but rather born of a mercantile desire to give the public what it wants, must not blind us to the always present possibility of genuine art coming from this source; to deny it, would be to be placed in an embarrassing critical position with respect to the Elizabethan drama. Nor must the romantic appeal of the pageant be over-

looked, an aspect of the drama just coming into its own and promising so much educationally. The attractive visualization of history or literature in this fashion is so eagerly seized upon that the only wonder is that it has not been utilized long before. Mr. Mackaye, whether in his critical writings or in an open-air pageant like "The Canterbury Pilgrims," has done worthy pioneer work in this field; and already, in the various sections of the land, in New England and the south, in the middle and far west, local traditions and records are giving up of their treasures that the people may be taught of the past, reminded of the continuity and dignity of the communal life; and may realize, as they never can from the grave pages of formal history, how much of romance inheres in the supposedly dry annals of antiquity.

The children's Shakspeare Festival in Chicago in the spring of 1912, conducted under the auspices of The Drama League of America, was a novel illustration of the many

possibilities offered by the general idea of folk festival allied with the rehabilitation of the past.

An impressive example of the effective use of local history for stage spectacle, where the record is so romantic as to lend itself admirably to such treatment, is that of the California "Mission Play," written by Mr. John S. McGroarty, and presented in the old Mission town of San Gabriel in the spring of 1912. In a theatre built in the Mission style expressly for the purpose, was enacted a drama which set before large and deeply interested audiences the graphic story of the Spanish religious settlement upon Californian shores, making central the beautiful pioneer figure of Father Junipero. The success of this historic pageant play has kept the theatre open and it bids fair to be a permanent object-lesson in the way in which history can be vitalized in the playhouse.

But there is another phase of romantic stage literature in which the play depicts those higher spiritual qualities of the race

the exhibition of which bespeak the divinity which is in man. Here again, the hard-and-fast line is impossible, merely the figment of the critic for the sake of convenience. Tully's "Bird of Paradise," for instance, has the romanticism of ethnic faith quite as truly as the exotic note of setting; and Moody's "The Great Divide," a psychologic ideality that helps to make the play stirring, while its western coloring adds the external touch of romance. Yet it is right enough to speak of this emphasis upon the spiritual as definitely giving a drama the romantic value which inheres in what transcends the wonted experience and the workaday scene. Moody, whether in closet plays like "The Masque of Judgment," and "The Fire Bringer," or in practical stage vehicles like "The Great Divide," and "The Faith Healer," is essentially the poet, and his view the poet's view. He recognizes the realities of man's mounting spirit and insists in giving a place to that inner life which marks his difference from the lower orders of existence. The final

scene in "The Great Divide," where Ghent tells his New England wife of the mystic change that has come to him through his love, and so teaches her narrow traditionalism a broader conception of humanity, is very beautiful poetry indeed. It represents that lofty use of the imagination which seizes on the common facts of living and exposes their finer significance in the realm of character; I would call it their symbolic significance, were it not for the wretched misuse of the word to denote mental crotchets of many kinds.

And still more truly is the second play, "The Faith Healer," a noble specimen of the prose romance in our native playmaking. It was a bold and worthy attempt to take a type like Michaelis straight out of the Bible and set him in an American desert. It is like saying to the audience: "The St. John the Baptists are not only to be found in the Oriental wastes thousands of years ago, but here and now; man is still visioned, prophetic, capable of seership. Only, you

must have faith, even as had he." A drama such as this cannot be easily disposed of by the remark that it was a failure on the stage, and hence is not a good play. Before accepting the verdict, we must define a good play and also understand who settled its fate. "The Faith Healer" has not as yet received the opinion of American playgoers in any general way. It is entirely probable that its unfavorable reception in New York was a too hasty, local judgment to be of much value. It may even be surmised that the play was produced somewhat ahead of its time and must await its proper audience. Some of the drama of Shaw, now very popular, had to wait thus many years for a theatre audience; but it came. I wish later in the discussion to return to this matter of success. It would be a depressing thought with regard to the dramatic future in America not to believe that so fine a piece of dramatic literature as this last Moody play was not to be in the end on our regular native repertory.

The same feeling may be expressed of Mr. Mackaye's "The Scarecrow." His work in verse drama follows him with those who use that form and will be discussed in the next chapter. But Mr. Mackaye's prose also has the imaginative idealistic implications which make it romantic, as "Mater," "The Scarecrow," and "Yankee Fantasies" demonstrate. Easily first among his plays, and to my mind one of the few dramas so far written and produced in a theatre that can lay claim to being dramatic literature in the more permanent sense, is "The Scarecrow." Unlike much of the writer's work, it possesses external theatric appeal to attract a general audience, while for those who follow Shaw's mandate and bring their brains with them to the playhouse, it has the advantage of a high theme adequately handled as to technic and clothed in an expressional form, which is the only preservative for any play. Then, too, it has the merit of being genuinely American; taking a hint from Hawthorne, it visualizes the romantic New England past

in a way to give pleasure at the evocation, at the same time that the motive, the ennobling power of love which before our very eyes changes a dead man a living spirit and culminates in a victor death, has a meaning that is not only eighteenth century New England, but universally human. Here is tragedy, using the word in its best tradition. It is a duty to give faith to a writer still young, who, whatever the inequalities of his drama in general, can produce one such work as this. Let it be added that the delicate poetry in that other prose play, "Mater," with its romance of character in the mother who embodies the eternal spirit of love which has in it the feeling of spring and the serene indifference to moral calamity, is further proof of this author's welcome aspiration to do justice to the higher reaches of human imagination and experience. It is a pity that a piece in many ways so charming, and surely right in its main concept, should have failed of complete success by the somewhat inconclusive, too subtle nature

of its ending. One can but believe that Mr. Mackaye's greatest promise for the future lies in the two veins of playfully imaginative satire and romantically handled spiritual issues to which sufficient objectivity has been given; two kinds illustrated by "The Scarecrow" and "Mater." The fact that he is sensitively awake to the thoughtful issues of the day is shown in his recent drama, "Tomorrow," where he has boldly seized on eugenics as a central theme in a love story. It may be that, as the title suggests, this is a play more likely to be welcomed to-morrow than to-day; but it is vital and earnest, and nothing is more likely than the acceptance of such motives for playmaking, and general literary treatment, when what now seems primarily scientific has been so incorporated into our thought as to possess emotional value. It is altogether too early to be sure about a writer evidently still in the experimental period. And the consideration of his verse plays must follow anon.

The possibility of making allegory effec-

tive in play form, now as in the past, is perhaps most conspicuously set forth by the drama of Charles Rann Kennedy, who, although English born and bred, has cast his fortunes with our native playmakers, and, indeed, sought American citizenship.

Here is a dramatist not afraid to admit into his work a frank element of the didactic, but who, trained as an actor and with a practical knowledge which the literary preacher so seldom commands, has been able to surround thesis with enjoyable human story, nor forgotten that the art of the stage, like any other, must spell entertainment for the multitude. He seems tremendously in earnest, deeply interested in life and aware that humanity at large is much concerned with spiritual matters. The public reception of "The Servant in the House," the first play to make him known, indicated more than a response to a novelty. The revival of "Everyman" had paved the way for the use of allegory and morality on the stage. But it was the spiritual appeal, pure and simple,

that more than aught else made the play significant. The story, as such, was not remarkable; its originality lay in the bold projection into an ordinary mundane setting of the Christ ideal in the guise of the mystic Oriental whose word is love and whose influence therefore is irresistible. To make a fuss about a drain merge in a Beatitude,—that was well conceived and worthily done. It was, moreover, a notification to all concerned that religious ideas could still be made vital in a theatre to the popular apprehension; not for the rapt worship of the select in some dramatic Toyhouse, but as broad, democratic amusement. And the fact served at once to extend and dignify our very conception of the function of the stage. There are few more significant incidents in American dramatic history than the performance of this piece by the Miller Players on a Sunday at the University of Michigan, upon an invitation by the authorities. A representative educational institution of the west thus expressed its conviction that the

Sabbath was none too good a day for a drama as nobly uplifting as this. It may be added that any weekday is too good for innumerable plays therein to be witnessed.

As this play had nobility of idea, so it had skill of execution and a deft use of material. Its success was no doubt strengthened by such a scene as that between father and daughter in act third. To the technician there was much of interest; notably, the "scene indivisible," the curtain falling only to rise again upon the next moment's action; the first attempt of its kind, I believe, in a full-length English-speaking play. Mr. Kennedy has shown himself consistently an experimenter in form throughout his work.

For one thing, he is evidently interested in a more compact unity of structure. "The Winter Feast," his next play, is played in the one setting of a great hall half-illuminated by firelight; the key is that suitable for a sombre story of love and hate, and becomes a dramatic adjunct. Similarly, "The Terrible Meek" is played in darkness; and for

"The Necessary Evil" the direction reads "to be played in the light," a suggestive statement in relation to the nature of the piece. It is not impossible that the gray monotone of scene in "The Winter Feast" may help to explain its failure, although it was artistically right as background for a psychologic tragedy as logical and laconic as one of the old Norse sagas. The relation of color scheme to theatre mood and consequent fortune of a given play is an aspect of the theatre problem still largely in the vague. In any case, this terse historical drama in which we see a lie in its inevitable sequence, increases one's admiration for the author's literary resource.

"The Terrible Meek," with its novelty of the darkened stage which heightens the tension by making the one appeal to the ear, bringing the message as if from a world beyond physical sight, is an experiment in the one-act form and also illustrates the author's prepossession with idea. The meek shall inherit the earth; how else, save by that eloquent pleading of silence and submission

to the wrong that is done them? The play suggests that as the founder of Christianity died to make memorable this principle, so it is further set forth whenever a man innocently perishes in war? Here is Mr. Kennedy's preachment against war, and he, like Mr. Zangwill in "The War God," aligns himself with much modern thought. The perfectly reverent visualization of the ancient sacrifice, type of all since, was dangerous because it exposed the writer to the absurd charge of tampering with holy things. The woful state of much dramatic criticism in this land was revealed by the frequency with which this play was called "sacrilegious." When Calvary was dimly bodied forth in the dawn, the mind properly established the connection and realized that, now as then, the meek conquer even in apparent defeat.

In "The Necessary Evil," we get the author's protest against the conventional view of the fallen woman, which puts her beyond the pale; and also against the trite tradition that the young and pure should remain igno-

rant of the world as it is: the sort of ignorance which led Miss Robins' "Little Sister" to her doom. The problem is debatable, with earnest and honest folk on either side; and nowhere an honester opinion than this. Regarded merely as a story, it is exceedingly interesting, as it is handled in a one-act scene with such character contrasts in father, son, daughter and half-mystic woman of the streets who, seating herself in the seat of the dead mother, links herself in this scenic way with the eternal womanhood which is One, of which she is therefore a part. The imagination which has here been able to suggest so much beyond the mere external facts as they appear, is one that is needed and welcome upon our stage to-day.

It is stimulating to hear that Mr. Kennedy's next drama, "The Idol Breaker," has for its subject human freedom and is dedicated to the American people,—the writer's adoptive country.

One of the emancipated young managers in New York, Mr. Arthur Hopkins, has declared that the future drama in this land will

be a drama of ideas, "stage production with an idea underlying it. The idea's the coming thing," says Mr. Hopkins. "Let an author have an idea, and a producer the ability to see it, and to work to get it over to the audience, and you have the drama of the future."

Mr. Kennedy looks very much like such a dramatist. He has ideas, which he expresses in terms of skilled playmaking, and those ideas contain heart, conscience, imagination. He sets before audiences the romance of conduct, the poetry of spiritual ideals. And whatever be the individual disagreement with his thesis, he can count, increasingly, upon a large following that recognizes clean workmanship and wholesome thinking when they are offered.

It is evident that in various ways those better elements of life which give it romantic meaning are being portrayed in the theatre by writers, most of them young and feeling their way as yet tentatively, who are receiving encouragement from theatre-goers in such interpretation of the human spectacle.

Whether it be the romance of setting, or story; of exotic atmosphere, or the pleasure evoked by the mysterious and mystic; whether the stimulus come from the wonders of science, or the spiritual realm that lies beyond scientific ken and gives opportunity for the display of the highest that is in human beings, the unifying fact is, that another interest than that of the factual, the actual and the average is aroused. This appeal and its response are now very perceptibly a part of the dramatic current as it widens to take in many contributory waters.

And, of course, this recrudescence of the romantic is but the reaction of our day to the eternal-romantic which is ever reappearing because it is a constituent part of life, a mood that man for his own sake must cherish, and will. For a little, perhaps, it may be submerged, seemingly drowned in the seethe of topical subject-matter and superficial photography; but it rises to the surface once more, bringing precious things from the depths, even that Beauty which is but the finer expression of truth.

VII

POETRY

POETRY on the stage might be conveniently described as romance at its best of subject-matter, plus definite metrical form. To say this, is not to forget that in the broad sense (a sense recognized in German by the use of the word), poetry cannot other than arbitrarily be confined to verse plays. When the writer's view rises to vision, and imagination kindling with emotion leads on to music, the verse born is natural; it becomes a psychologic necessity rather than a mere technical or traditional device or convention. Let it be granted that Kennedy's "The Terrible Meek" and Moody's "The Faith Healer" are poetry, although written in prose: yet, we have a right, I think, to place in a category still higher, such drama as Peabody's "The Piper," because the poetic form

is the outward expression of a loftier flight. The present writer must disagree with those who hold that verse is no longer acceptable in our modern theatre and particularly *de trop* in "practical" America. That idea of the exclusively practical and materialistic nature of the American type, handed along as a stupid tradition, has been contradicted by the work of our thinkers and writers from Jonathan Edwards to Mark Twain, and might well be allowed to die. It is pleasant to hear M. Bergson, a recent distinguished visitor to our shores, declare his sense of the national idealism he thought he detected alike in our architecture, business life and educational aims.

Were it the business of dramatic art to photograph life and nothing more; to reproduce its average surface manifestations nor aim at the deeper truth which is psychologic and would report of the subjective soul experiences of man,—thus seeking by selective adaptation to interpret life's meaning,—then verse as a form of utterance might be tabu

to-day. But this is surely not so. Every pair of lovers, irrespective of class, education or morale, are in a state of mind such that they think and feel poetry, if they do not speak it. The blank verse spoken by Romeo and Juliet is exactly the language which conveys their emotional condition, even if it is not at all the actual speech of an Italian boy and girl seized by the master passion. It is the business of great art to give us a vivid sense of their feeling, and blank verse is a medium for externalizing this, and hence, is truer a hundred times than it would be to reproduce after the manner of the phonograph the stammering insufficiency of the love-lorn twain. The great artists of fiction and drama in their love scenes have recognized this and secured their effects in accordance with the principle. It is Maeterlinck's merit that in his earlier plays he gives us a realization of the value of silences, of the unsaid, while he wrote dialogue full of banale repetition and daring commonplace. The reader, aroused in his imagination, reads

between the lines and listens to the poetry of feeling which is behind the prose of expression,—another way of bringing about the same thing. The argument, in fact, might be extended to include many other aspects of life than those centering in the amatory emotions. In his recent play "Rivoli," René Fanchois explains his passing from verse to prose in different acts, according to the kind of life shown. Camp life, being democratic, he affirms (*on peut les tutoyer*) is in prose. "But with the coming of Buonaparte, all changes; severe discipline begins; little battalions, the words of the drama, are organized by the master. They align, they form regular companies; they become verse."

I may add that to regard Shakspeare's mingling of verse and prose as merely the obeysance of an artistic convention of his day is to miss the point. His free use of both forms within the same play, unlike the habit which preceded him, was an expression of his bold union of the homely, humorous and commonplace with that which was high and

beautiful, as he saw they were mingled in life.

Those adventurous spirits, then, like Miss Peabody and Mr. Mackaye, who have used the verse form, are within their rights: if the theme be fit and the mood authentic, the audience—yes, even the much-abused American audience—will not object. The reiterated statement that, the theatre being democratic, and the play properly aimed at the general, poetry, which is for the few, can never make the wide appeal to insure success, by no means settles this important question. In its primary significance, poetry, that is to say, story presented in a songful way, has been the favorite mode of expression in the early development of all peoples. And if, in its later and subtler manifestations, poetry comes to exist for the comparatively limited number who are prepared for it, dramatic pioneers who use it (encouraged by so much in the past) will find their hearers, though few, and can afford to wait for the larger hearing. As Mr. Aldrich remarked in

a private letter, "it is the few who settle the fate of poetry." Nor is it conclusive to say, in opposing this view, that, whereas the general audiences in the Globe Theatre were ready for Shakspeare's imaginative lines, the modern audience wishes prose and is bored by the scholar-specialist's attempt to revive an outworn fashion. On the contrary, the native theatre within the past ten years has counted among its distinct successes, plays which have dealt idealistically with life, whether in verse form or not, and plays which have embodied poetic conceptions in the traditional verse forms have failed, if failed they have, because they were bad plays, rather than because they were in verse. I am inclined to believe that a drama which is poetry both in form and substance, and also dramatic—and which, moreover, is not killed in advance by allowing the unfortunate impression to get abroad that it was for the élite alone, would receive a cordial reception. The public is not so averse from imaginative beauty as some managers and

critics seem to imagine. The genuine favor with which a play like "The Piper" has been greeted, here and abroad, makes for the conclusion that such work is welcome in this country.

Mrs. Marks has a distinguished place as a lyric poet. One such volume as her "The Singing Year" would settle that claim. But like many another lyrist within the last few years, she has turned to dramatic verse, and done work that has gained in stage value while it has not lost in literary flavor. The earlier "Marlowe" and "Fortune and Men's Eyes" were charming examples of the use of Elizabethan subject-matter, and the former particularly had a salience of characterization in the title figure and an atmospheric setting called for by the motive which made it not only an enjoyable piece of work to read but decidedly effective when played by the Harvard students, with the assistance of Professor George P. Baker. Of both dramas, however, it is fair to say that they were of lyric rather than of dramatic quality. Nor

with all its strange beauty can we speak otherwise of "The Wings," seen in Boston in a special performance.

But "The Piper" exhibited the author as one who could successfully make the broad appeal to a general audience and yet write a noble poem in stage form. With the mere result of public applause, the English verdict which awarded the Stratford prize to Miss Peabody may have had something to do. But when the play was given somewhat tardily at the New Theatre in New York, it was revealed, for all its subtlety and delicacy, as a genuine theatre piece. Many of us, on reading it, may have pronounced it delightful poetry, but hardly stage material. Probably we did not realize its external picturesqueness and the unforced beauty of its child mood passing from tenderness to tenderness into the high spiritual note of the climax, when the Piper, embodiment of joy and *wanderlust*, yields the little ones back to their homes and allows the claim upon them of that ideal of the Lonely Man which is

greater even than joy: self-sacrifice and the comforting of sorrow.

It was a somewhat daring experiment to seize on a story so integrally associated with Browning as this of the Pied Piper. But the Victorian poet handled it in ballad fashion with his original youthful audience in mind; it remained for the American to enrich it with psychological meanings, triumphantly successful in a much more difficult genre. Here is another answer to the silly criticism which objects to derivation in literary motives. The fundamental question for art, is not where you get it, but what you do with it. And this play is written in lovely blank verse interspersed with occasional lyric forms. The form is absolutely congruous with the theme, and it is hard to see what would be gained if prose were used; contrariwise, it is very easy to imagine the loss. There are passages which for the sure transmitting of character and story might be condensed to advantage. But that this, in its kind, is a good acting drama is indisputable. A mem-

ber of the Benson Company in England told me that nothing they did outside of Shakspeare received warmer response in the provinces than this Peabody play.

It is steadily the purpose of this study to speak of the significant acting drama in America, which, whether published or not, possesses some value in technical accomplishment, literary quality, and interpretation of life. Drama that has literary worth but is obviously not written for, or at least not adapted to, stage use, even when important in letters, is not included in the survey. It must be borne in mind, however, that poetic plays may have been written which as yet have had no production in the theatre and nevertheless may be genuine stage drama, for which the native audience has not been quite ready. Such a drama as George H. Boker's "*Francesca Da Rimini*," dating a generation ago, proved its acceptability for acting purposes and is dramatically superior to later plays on the same theme. Thomas Bailey Aldrich's "*Mercedes*" would certainly

appear to have acting value, although his "Judith of Bethulia," fine poetry as it is, lacks the essentials of practical technic. The so-called closet play, pure and simple, has been and is being vigorously written in the United States, but more and more from this time forth poetic expression will be compelled to obey the exigent demands of the footlights, if it is to be vitally related to our dramatic literature.

The time is well-nigh over when our aspiring Shelleys and Swinburnes will write in nominal dramatic form with no real knowledge of the theatre, and perhaps no definite purpose of presentation. In such work as Dr. van Dyke's "Rimon," a really excellent dramatic opportunity handled with undoubted vigor and literary atmosphere, the work suffers from the want of the expert hand; collaboration, one feels, would shape a drama that might make the dual appeal of literature and the stage. The remark applies as well to the drama that is being written by Cale Young Rice, who may yet prove himself

a poet of the theatre. Certainly his charming one-act piece, "A Night in Avignon," gave pleasure to audiences when it was witnessed at the hands of the Donald Robertson Players in Chicago. Mrs. Dargan's interesting work in poetic drama also falls into this category; most of it, and this is especially true of the third volume entitled "The Mortal Gods," does not meet the requirements of presentation. One play at least in an earlier book, to wit, "The Shepherd," has the elements of an acting play. Again, it is impossible to read "The City" and "The Tides of Spring" by the late Arthur Upson, without feeling that had the author not died untimely, he would have learned to meet stage demands and brought to it poetry of the high kind which dignifies the theatre. In fact, plans are making while these words are being written for the production of the last-named one-act piece by the Little Theatre in Chicago.

The elaborate and somewhat austere classical plays of the late George Cabot Lodge

constitute closet drama obviously; and hence, filled with beauty as they are, they are not quite germane to the discussion. Mr. Hermann Hagedorn, Jr.'s work may be watched as not unlikely to perform the marriage of stage technic and literature, and the same hope is aroused by Mr. Ridgley Torrence, whose "Abelard and Heloise" was accepted by a leading actress, although as yet it has not been seen. Miss Amelia J. Burr, in several published plays, of which "The Point of Life" is the most noteworthy, shows the gift of spiritual insight and imaginative expression with an increasing sense of dramatic value, and it does not seem rashly prophetic to say that sooner or later her work will be heard in the playhouse. One piece, indeed, has been accepted by a well-known actress.

Mr. Moody's verse plays are academic and of high import as such, but executed with no thought of practical use.

Were the closet play within the purview, the remarkable cycle of poetic dramas planned and but partially carried out by the

late Richard Hovey would perforce also demand more attention than is suitable to the plan. He had conceived a dramatic series dealing with the Arthurian stories and entitled "Launcelot and Guenevere, A Poem in Drama," and described in the poet's own words as "a re-telling of the central drama about which the other legends of the Arthurian cycle are grouped." Of the nine books, as planned, four dramas were published: "The Quest of Merlin," "The Marriage of Guenevere," "The Birth of Galahad," and "Taliesin"—the first and last masques in form. It was Hovey's purpose to take these old tales, so often and splendidly lending themselves to imaginative treatment in letters, art and music, and interpret them anew in their modern psychologic and poetic implications. From what he did in the completed plays, and "The Holy Grail" and other fragments printed since his death, it can be seen that this large Schema was such as to insure some noble poetry thrown into

the play form; and concludes that the author founded in shape is for stage use.

It is therefore an interesting question if the drama be really suited to production, so that we may hope to see it in the future when a treasury of native drama has been established on our stage? This may be doubted. In any case, it is true that the last completed play, "Talena," which is undoubtedly the finest as poetry, is further removed from the stage drama. Mr. Newman has noted his remoteness from human interest. Had Henry had time thoroughly to work over his whole conception, the result might have been otherwise. From his own power and the encouragement supplied by his wife, it appears that he intended the cycle for production; and his own practical training as an actor must be remembered. Yet to read what we possess compels the conclusion that this is noble dramatic literature, not thrown into the shape necessary to give it the proper effect under stage restrictions.

The clear distinction to be made between all the un-actable dramatic writing of a generation ago and that of to-day lies in the evident attempt of the younger writers to become true theatre poets, that their voice may be heard in the playhouse. In short, the poetic drama is trying to turn practicable, to be dramatic as well as poetic.

Mr. Mackaye's work, when he essays poetic form, illustrates the point. His verse dramas have been staged by good managers and acted by distinguished players; he is an American Stephen Phillips in this respect. The plays by Mr. Mackaye are likely to be part of the poetic stage repertory just beginning to be formed in this country. "A Garland for Sylvia," of mingled prose and verse, was an early college performance and can hardly be included in the list. But "Fenris the Wolf" is a powerful, original work, cast in verse form, a re-shaping of the Northern myth in a way to beget a desire that it might be seen in the theatre. No doubt it would lend itself less easily to playing than the

later "Jeanne d' Arc," and "Sapho and Phaon"; partly perhaps because it exhibits a more untried hand and also from the nature of the material. But with revision and condensation, it should be given a hearing and no doubt will be in time. Of the two other dramas, "Jeanne d' Arc" is much the better acting piece, though "Sapho and Phaon" has greater beauty, both of conception and execution; and is a more original work in every way. Mr. Mackaye's treatment of the familiar French story has admirable pictorial qualities and as it is historical and belongs to the chronicle history order of play, must be judged according to its kind. It is perhaps inevitable that it should be less dramatic, more episodic and less close-knit than the type of story where the writer is not conditioned by facts. In its kind, however, it is a charming thing and it achieved a considerable measure of success when enacted by the Sotherns. Altogether, it may be said of Mr. Mackaye as a poet and dramatist that he is among the

few to whom we look at any time for possible additions to a repertory altogether too scant.

A few other young writers are of promise if not of performance, and any season now may bring forth fruit that is worthy. Agnes Lee, John G. Neihardt, Stark Young, Louis J. Block, Jeannette Marks, Martin Schütze, Mary Johnston, and others still have written in the form of verse drama sufficiently to suggest a sure grasp upon it if they but persist and choose to give themselves to such expression. Miss Johnston's "The Triumph of Reason" has been produced. Up to the present, it may be confessed that no poet on this side of the water, with the possible exception of Mr. Mackaye, has as yet evinced such familiarity with stage technique as that possessed by Stephen Phillips and W. B. Yeats. That this will come, with the audience to appreciate it, it is a part of sane patriotism to believe.

The American audience is not adverse from Beauty, so much has been proved; the

imaginative appeal does not go a-begging when backed by the necessary skill and the manager intelligent enough to give it a hearing; and arbitrarily to limit that appeal to prose form would be suicidal to the drama which is a part of letters. Grant that the gleanings so far are comparatively slight; at least, there is perceptible growth, and to deny that the field shall yet whiten to the harvest is to be purblind indeed. A quarter of a century ago E. C. Stedman foresaw the coming of an American poetic drama, and he spoke purely in a prophetic rôle; were he writing now, he would be the more confident in proportion as the goal is within hailing distance.

VIII

HUMOR AND THE SOCIAL NOTE

IT sounds trite enough to say that American drama, to be genuine and worth while, must be democratic. But using the word so as to include all its implications, the remark will bear scrutiny. To be democratic in the broadest sense, is to estimate human beings for their character and accomplishment, independent of all the tests of convention, fashion and folly. The true democrat, who through the machinery of government gets his equal opportunity of influence compared with others, when he considers the social instead of political organism, insists on estimating his fellow American on the basis of worth rather than any form of prominence due to other causes. It might take us too far afield to ask ourselves to what degree this social ideal is lived up to in a nominally democratic land like the United States; but

to set up a claim to a distinctive social life, we must at least declare it to be an ideal, recognizable as an aspiration, and therefore properly a subject for art.

And this sentiment, attitude, belief—whatever name we give it—finds expression largely in a humorously satiric exposure of any and all exhibitions of undemocratic life, which violate this treasured principle of social democracy.

American humor in general, working from Benjamin Franklin to Mark Twain with broad strokes and by means now of shrewd Yankee understatement, now of western exaggeration, or again of whimsical southern insouciance, has underlying it as a necessary substructure a wholesome sense of the incongruity to be seen whenever in a land avowedly democratic, aristocratic standards and conventions seem to prevail. Humor must be central and important in our drama, because the greater includes the less, and it is central and important in American literature; some critics, in fact, would go so far as

to say that it is the dominant characteristic of our letters. In any case, humor is a welcome weapon in a democratic land, with which to fight all enemies, acknowledged or secret, of the principle of social equality. That humor of this kind is salient in the native playmaking, is, I should suppose, very obvious; it might be queried whether it be not the first trait to be observed: And it is in the main the sort of influence that acts as a healthy antidote to pretence and pose. Where, in its place, we are given the cynical wit that can be recognized as an importation from Europe, we have a right to think of it as less representative, and so less desirable in the development.

It is in their humorous comprehension of the American type, in both its weakness and strength, that the plays of Ade, Tarkington, Wilson and Cohan—allowing them to stand for numerous others—make their legitimate appeal for our suffrages. Whatever the shortcomings in literary quality, technic and serious criticism of life, they often do possess an

almost indescribable but most enjoyable quality of seeing through pretension, and making it ridiculous, which makes them social documents to be reckoned with. This is true, for example, of the spirit in which Ade's "Father and the Boys" is written; true of the conception of the American in "The Man from Home," in Messrs. Wilson and Tarkington's hands; the European contrast may be overdrawn, but it is quite unfair to the authors not to credit them with an authentic Americanism in the feeling of the thing; and this largely explains the remarkable vogue of the piece. Again in Mr. Cohan's story dramatization, "Get Rich Quick Wallingford" there is an enjoyably humorous perception of certain American tendencies in finance and business; as there is in Mr. Smith's "The Fortune Hunter," with its delightful sense of self-reliant optimism in the conductment of affairs. The noteworthy thing about such work, academically treated as if below contempt, is that it could not have been done anywhere else in the world but in America;

it is really native portrayal. In earlier days the instinct gave us the Bardwell Slotes and Davy Crocketts of pleasant memory. Mr. Mackaye has contributed a daringly imaginative type in the one-act play, "Sam Average," where humor blends with pathos to make a beautiful delicate texture of patriotism. Occasionally, in the past, as in Twain and Warner's Colonel Sellers, humorous types that depict national characteristics have been transferred from fiction to the stage; it will be done more and more in our drama without such borrowing, as the play by preference absorbs the interest of the literary worker and turns him from the novel to the stage. Such a type as the strolling actor in "Your Humble Servant" was well worth limning; since it has passed, or is passing; and so was the southern gentleman gambler of "Cameo Kirby" by the same authors. Although humor may not be dominant in a character like Stephen Ghent in Mr. Moody's "The Great Divide," there are moments when he finely expresses a mood of the great western plains

containing this daredevil brotherliness so full of the native flavor. In Mr. Walter's comedy "Paid in Full," the humor of the situation, grimly handled as it is and deepening toward tragic results, is nevertheless the element of the play which, by mitigating its serious satiric value, made it a successful Broadway drama. Types adoptively American, such as may be seen in Mr. Locke's "The Climax" and Mr. Klein's "The Music Master," offer a fine field for dramatic exploitation, a field by no means fully worked as yet, but plainly appreciated by the younger playwrights; so that much of interest and value may be forthcoming. Even where the drama runs to plot and the complications thereof, and so becomes farce, it is a shallow look at plays like "Seven Days" and "Baby Mine" that does not detect some humorous character drawing that smacks of the soil. There is genuine and legitimate fun derived from the contrast between New York and Boston in such a social study as "Years of Discretion," the Hattons' clever comedy; and

the light satiric touch upon foolish fads of the hour is none the less keen. No week during the dramatic season in New York fails to reveal among the pieces struggling to survive in a competition that is too great to allow of justice for some undeserved failures, character studies that are admirable, scenes that in themselves wellnigh justify the whole drama, happily conceived thrusts at some obvious social folly or wrong: all of it made pleasing by the peculiarly American mood and method with which life is humorously designated. If most often we seem to get lightness for its own sake—and there is always the likelihood that with our rich endowment in this sense of life's laughable incongruities, we may sacrifice too much to the God of fun—yet moments do not lack in contemporary drama when behind the good-natured satiric merriment can be detected a Molièrian intention to castigate folly and correct social abuse. For humor is simply the most favorable expression of that social sympathy of which the seriously emotional

treatment strikes the deeper note; the democratic human relations are portrayed in both, and humor has a mighty mission in relieving the strain and horror inhering in the tragic presentation. It is this sympathy, this social altruism, which permeates the thought of our better plays, just as truly in comedy in the way of humor, as in the tragic portrayal where the withers are wrung for the misery of fellow creatures. It is not too much to say that this social note must be sounded in vital drama at the present time. A profound influence upon literature has followed the ever-growing sense of human rights, which since the late eighteenth century has widened with the process of the suns. It has meant for our generation greater political and social privileges, manifold industrial reforms, the sharpest challenging of prerogative and privilege, the emancipation of women in various ways, and the universal spread of a practical altruistic interest in fellow men. The social worker, as never before, is abroad, and the under dog in the

social struggle is receiving an attention likely to be at once sympathetic and intelligent when compared with the past. Sympathy has been organized, and the well-meaning personal desire to help, which so often is in danger of radiating into thin air, now finds its definite object and direction.

A drama that is to be vitally related to its time must therefore in some way reflect and reproduce this typical manifestation of the spirit of man to-day. Fiction has been doing this for many years and has because of such activity, given new proof of its serious possibilities. The American play, to be something more than deft craftsmanship and meaningless amusement, must, if it desires to be taken seriously either as art or life, also sound this ground chord of the human harmony; not only

the still sad music of humanity,

but, as is natural to a land like ours, its note of buoyant belief, its cheery facing of the future, and its relish of inspiring opportu-

nity. Has our drama, then, along with its more faithful depiction of local phenomena and its occasional value as psychological study, its homely, hearty fun, as well as its refreshing turning to romance and poetry in reaction from gray reality, sounded this social note that expresses the time and should interpret the time in art? Are Americans writing plays like Houghton's "Hindle Wakes," Sowerby's "Rutherford and Son," Galsworthy's "Justice," and Shaw's "Mrs. Warren's Profession"? Replying impulsively, and as a generalization, the answer would seem to be, No. Yet it is not fair to make the assertion too sweepingly; it hits nearer the truth to say that, so far, the British writers have been bolder in statement, more independent of what the public is supposed to want, than have the Americans. Of course, critics in plenty can be found to declare that it is all the better if our playwrights have confined themselves to straight playmaking and eschewed the rôle of saviors of society or specialists in human pathology. If this

meant that the play was lost sight of in the preachment, or that the flowers of rhetoric were substituted for genuine dramatic effects, the feeling would be entirely justified. There is an argument against Ibsen's "Ghost" as entertainment, even if nothing can be said against it as thesis and dramaturgy. To take an illustration from abroad: some of the late plays of Brieux, when they devote a last act to discussion, with the story quite over, may properly be attacked as unsatisfactory playmaking, whatever their sociological value.

But vital drama is frequently being produced in other lands to-day that does not for a moment forget the primary business of entertainment, yet is most stimulating for its suggestive interpretation of life and the implicit social sympathy which bathes it like an atmosphere. And in an age such as this, so bewilderingly agitated with problem, experiment and aspiration, drama cannot be representative in the deeper sense, when it comfortably turns aside from all such motives to

follow the primrose path of pleasure. In so far as it is to become a part of sound literature, the escape is impossible.

It seems to be modestly within the facts to say that the social note has begun to be heard in our drama. Surely, we hear it in Mr. Kennedy's work, in such plays as Mackaye's "To-morrow," Patterson's "Rebellion," Walter's "The Easiest Way," Edward Sheldon's "The High Road," Veiller's "Within the Law," H. S. Sheldon's "The Havoc," Marion Fairfax's "The Talker," and others easily added by any one who keeps watch upon current theatre offerings. Beneath the story, underlying the humor and excitement, may be detected the sympathetic interpretation of some phase of our common life, private or public, local or national, separately or as they intertwine to make American destiny. Fresh, first-hand observation gives verity to the picture which is made enjoyable by the kindly tolerant understanding behind the scenic appeal, or appeal of fable. Indeed, a convincing list of dramas could al-

ready be made which, either by way of main plot or episodic to the central theme, deal with aspects of the general social problem. To shut out such motives from latter-day playmaking is like the attempt to drive nature out with a pitchfork. Modern thinking, in any form of art, cannot exist without such admission of subject matter. The Man with the Hoe must be shown on canvas, in marble or in the written and spoken word; the Song of the Shirt is more insistent than ever, its wail carries further over the earth than when Hood first chanted it. It is of all things most natural that the drama, democratic people form of story telling as it is, should respond in this respect to the currents of thought and feeling which make our time distinctive; and it has, I repeat, begun to do so. Nor do I mean exclusive attention to the proletariat, an obsession with the unhappier forms of human misery; but rather, a catholic interest in all the exhibitions of man's struggle with himself, with society, or with the forces of Nature.

The test of all such work is sincerity. One observes with some uneasiness, as I have noted, certain plays by Klein, Walter, Broadhurst and Belasco, all successful playmakers, and therefore of influence in the movement, in which, although the theme is there, the material appears to be used solely for the sake of its dramatic value rather than because the author was inwardly impelled to self-expression by the questions of the day. I do not intend to imply that a dramatist should not above all else choose his subject matter for its availability for stage purposes; but to claim that behind the story should hide an unfeigned wish to say something on a matter of real import to all honest Americans. No one, for example, can doubt the sincere social note in Galsworthy's "Strife," Zangwill's "The Melting Pot," or Hauptmann's "The Weavers"; no, nor, with all its unpleasantness and lack of dramatic justification, in Brieux's "Damaged Goods." And I seem to find the same sincerity in Sheldon's "Salvation Nell." But one does not feel so sure

with regard to Moffat's "The Battle" and Broadhurst's "Bought and Paid For," and still more confidently, must refuse, on this ground, Fitch's "The City."

The distinction between the exploiter of social evil for its value as copy and the sincere social worker, must ever be borne in mind by the honest dramatist. It is the spurious substitute, here as in other departments of expressional criticism, who seizes upon an attractive motive with no personal conviction behind his story: the conviction of a Mackaye or a Kennedy. The muck-raker and the master of life are not in the same category. The wrongs of the tenement-house system may be fine and perfectly acceptable material from which the drama may be wrought, but such a theme should not be chosen because of the chance it offers for sensational handling. There is a great difference between a play like "Things We Create," by Mr. David Carb, one of the Harvard playwrights, and any one of half a dozen which of recent years have come

and gone: all of them stamped with the same trade-mark: *made to order*.

With these distinctions in mind, it would be instructive to compare three plays that deal with journalism, the American Patterson's "The Fourth Estate," and the two English dramas, Fagin's "The Earth," and Bennett's "What the Public Wants." The comparison, I fear, is in favor of the English; because, while they do not overlook the business of interesting and entertaining their audiences, they do handle the theme in such a way as to leave in the minds of the auditors to a greater degree some pertinent reflections upon the characteristics of modern newspaper life.

But with the clearer, stronger note that is being struck in modern drama generally, there can be little doubt that in America, as elsewhere, social sympathy will find fuller and freer expression, the play, like the novel, realizing its democratic possibilities. For already such motives are plainly being seized as dramatic material superior to what comes

from abroad, and to the silly frivolities and unnatural exaggerations which of old served as substitutes for the sincere painting of American conditions.

The paramount danger is haste, with its resultant carelessness. With so much that is richly open to stage use in the social spectacle,—contrasts of worker and idler, of man and woman, of individual and family, family and state, of poverty and riches, of class and creed, of sainthood and crime, it is no wonder that a dramatist, confronted by the practical necessity of earning his way, or later, seduced by the emoluments of his profession, should succumb to the temptation of scamping his work. To exhibit the superficial aspects of a situation, to invent melodramatic incidents that obscure the solution and to express half-baked views in place of thoughtful convictions, if indeed the duty of thinking out the problem be not dodged entirely, is so often quite sufficient to win applause and pelf, that it is perhaps a counsel of perfection to ask our playmakers in the present infancy of their art, to do more.

And yet, more they must do, in time, if our theatre is to be reckoned as a national asset; the appeal to history settles that. The drama that survives, in whatever period and of whatever race, is the drama that, along with adequate technic and the entertaining quality common to all good plays, reveals the spirit of the age, intellectual, social, spiritual, and is expressed in the literary form which is a preservative against the wear and tear of Time.

If the contemporary dramatist be content with the immediate success which unquestionably may be secured without this union of attributes; if he prefer to produce a vehicle merely adjusted to the idiosyncrasy of an individual actor, and which will die with the actor because unable to survive through independent merit; if he too hastily handle a fine theme, or waste his skill upon some empty trifle which tickles the senses of fools, but lacks the body of truth and the breath of life, he has made his choice.

But if, aside from the lure of honorable fame, he believes that the playwright should,

with others, aim at good citizenship, and so be glad to help the civilization of his day by making his fellow men think fruitfully and feel nobly in the playhouse, then will he strive to make his work worthy, representative, significant: drama that interprets life to men, that while it cheers, instructs, and while it entertains, also enlarges, and prepares for more generous living.

We must look fondly forward to such an ideal for our native theatre; not falling into a position so sadly supine as that expressed by an English paper, quoted by Mr. Henry Arthur Jones: "The English nation has made up its mind not to take its drama seriously"; but realizing that an opinion like that is in principle very much like giving up all interest in human development. And already, dramatists not a few are taking this broader, more manly, more patriotic view of their labor; and it is for the public to encourage them. Such encouragement they must have, indeed, if play-making is to be, not the chance effort of the individual,

trained or otherwise, but a recognized and reputable profession calling forth the steady powers of gifted persons, rewarded by money, and the respect of men, which is more than money.

And that encouragement means but one thing: intelligent recognition and patronage on the part of theatre-goers in such increasing numbers as to become an appreciable part of the whole body of those seeking entertainment in the playhouse. We need to-day a sense of duty in play-goers. I make the remark well aware that it exposes me at once to satire and abuse; but as it appears to me to be true, let it be spoken. What I mean is, the intelligent patron of the theatre must, as a matter of good citizenship, and a partial expression of the desire to see his country advance to a higher plane of civilization, select his plays for their significance and worth, train himself to know such, and influence his fellow Americans whenever possible to do the same. He must ask for intelligent, broad minded managers, theatre

conductors, and co-operative players. Also must he ask for trained and trustworthy dramatic critics, remembering that it is the recognition of their importance to the community that will advance them in place and power. All these servants of the theatre are creatures of the public, so that the responsibility comes home to roost with us. I shall return to the thought again later in the discussion.

This is not strained idealism but the homeliest common sense. The deep-seated inherited Puritan notion, that amusement to be amusing must be disconnected with serious purpose and helpful influence, will sooner or later go to the scrap-heap that awaits all antiquated ideas. Why not self-consciously help to make it sooner? To persist in the assumption that pleasure implies irresponsibility is to challenge God's plan in dowering man with the instinct of enjoyment and of joy.

IX

FICTION AND THE DRAMA

IT would be extremely silly to deliver jeremiads at the present day tendency to dramatize fiction and refer to it as one of the signs of degeneracy in the things of the theatre. For it has been steadily done from Elizabethan times, with Shakspeare as chief sinner, down to the stage versions of "Trilby," "Little Women," "The Daughter of Heaven" and "Bella Donna." As I suggested in an earlier chapter, there is one decided objection to all such re-shapings of imaginative material from one form to another; the impulse behind the work is likely to be practical, commercial, rather than creative. But exceptions will occur to all veteran theatre-goers and it is dangerous to dogmatize. "The Lady of the Camellias," it may be recalled, was first a piece of fiction, only secondarily a play that time seems unwilling to

eliminate; and Du Maurier's famous story when fitted by the expert hand of Mr. Rose to stage requirement, made a really effective drama which added a valuable character, that of Svengali, to the theatre repertory. Kipling's "The Light That Failed," in the stage version done for Forbes Robertson, disclosed genuine dramatic value; nor can lack of success, artistic and practical, be denied "The Dawn of a To-morrow."

Yet may one assert with confidence that it is quite right to look askance at any fiction made over for theatrical use. The presumption is against it, and the result usually justifies the scepticism. The novel-born play is under suspicion, even as is, in the light of facts, the actor-made drama.

It is natural enough that the practical purveyors of theatrical entertainment should desire to take advantage of the vogue of some piece of fiction and thereby reduce the risk of a venture universally conceded to be at the best an expensive hazard. And if the services of an experienced and able play-

wright can be secured and his interest in the job really aroused, there seems to be no reason why success should not follow, nor why, occasionally, a sound piece of art might not be produced. Certainly this happened in the days when Reade and Dickens were interested in the dramatic versions of their works. Only, peculiar difficulties of technic await all such efforts; and it is probable that the journeyman nature of it will but rarely attract first-rate talent. The audience is not homogeneously plastic to the play's first impression upon them, because a part of it at least has preconceptions of the story in novel form; much has to be omitted, new material perhaps introduced, and very likely a new orientation established in order that a character, before minor, may be made central in the dramatic weave. The problem thus becomes a mixed one; and the playwright's work would be much easier could he assume complete ignorance of the story on the part of the audience as a whole; or else premise that every member of it had

read the story before witnessing the play. As it is, he may fall between the two stools. Thoroughly equipped playwrights have assured us that the hardest work they ever attempted lay here.

There is, however, nothing whatever alarming in the frequent attempts to-day to turn fiction into theatre entertainment. For not only has it always been done, but there is, in the implied connection of a form of printed letters with the stage, an assumption that the drama is, or can be, literature; which is a good thing for the theatre, especially in an age when people have formed the habit of divorcing the two in their thoughts. And in the second place, the dramatization of fiction is not increasing, but diminishing as more and more our playwrights are supplying the managers with plays at first-hand and making the appeal to fiction less excusable or necessary to keep the playhouses busy.

The reverse process, that of novelizing plays, is more common than it was a few

years since and is so frankly unliterary and mercantile as to be self-explanatory. It is a way, of course, of popularizing a play and may have a certain practical excuse for being in relation to the cheaper magazines. On the whole, it may be safely left to live out a Philistine function unrelated absolutely to any serious consideration of stage literature and an unpleasant phenomenon to all who think of the stage as having any relation to letters and art. Such work is hack work, pure and simple, and can be nothing more.

But back of all fluctuations in the dramatized novel or novelized play, there is a question of critical interest and importance: what are the comparative merits of play and novel as twin forms of story telling? Does literary history offer an answer? Is there any significance in the fact that for more than a generation, the novel so-called has occupied the central place of interest and audience? And in the other fact, that now for the past few years, the play gives evident signs of gaining on fiction, so that it

looks as if it might in time resume the imperious sway which it exercised in the spacious days of good Queen Bess? Surely, these queries are pertinent and stimulating, if there be such a thing as the evolution of literature and its relation, social and psychologic, to its particular period.

It were pleasant, to fit a convenient theory, if we could roundly assert that prose narration, the primitive oral telling of story, came first in time, and drama, stage story enacted by the aid of action, word, gesture and scene, belonged to a later period. But this can by no means be easily proved. Some of the Biblical narratives take us back many hundreds of years before Christ; but there is reason for believing that the Chinese drama is full as ancient. I may be allowed to quote words of my own printed in another place: "Of the three ways of story telling, by the epic poem, the drama and prose fiction, the epic seems to be the oldest; poetry, indeed, being the natural form of expression among primitive peoples. The

comparative study of literature shows that so far as written records go, we may not surely ascribe precedence in time either to fiction or the drama. The testimony varies in different nations."

Be this as it may, it is a question entirely secondary compared with the broader and deeper one which asks why fiction in the novel form has been so long dominant, and why it now seems to be giving way a little to the play; and whether back of this there are any advantages which inhere in one form as against the other.

Both are obviously alike in the wish to depict life in terms of a unified narrative which possesses growth to a definite end. And the novel usurped the field of serious treatment of life, first, because from its nature and the nature of its audience, it could come closer to reality than the play, tell the truth about it more subtly and deeply than a form which, conventionally, traditionally, was or seemed obliged to divorce itself from life, and hand down a cer-

tain stock substitution for it. In short, fiction became psychologic before the drama, because it was in nature and method a more psychologic mode of literary expression and so tallied with the modern tendency. It could, by indirection, analysis, episodic handling, repetition and emphasis upon the details so influential to create atmosphere (in contrast with the main facts that make plot), interpret the human show in a way far more satisfactory to any age so introspective, so interested in character, as our own. Hence, the novel grasped this opportunity and did wonderful things with it for half a century or more; nay, is still in the midst of a fruitful achievement.

But it was reserved for very recent years to witness the awakening of the drama to the possibility of reclaiming from fiction the study of character that is more than the rapid, superficial indication of some single trait; that gives a sense of the complexity and infinite variety of human beings. The play began to be psychologic, despite the

limitation of its method, the disadvantage under which it works in comparison with fiction. The change was furthered by novelists of repute who turned from fiction to the drama; as where in England, Mr. Barrie, Mr. Galsworthy and Mr. Bennett essayed successfully the new form; or in this country, Mr. Davis, Mr. Tarkington and Mr. Wilson and Mr. Ade made the same attempt, with less certainty of achievement, yet in some instances with hopeful results. But the novelist in various lands is learning the technic so different from his own and may be counted on as a factor in making the play psychologic. And, to assist him in the development, playwrights who have not written fiction have recognized the opportunity and striven to give more depth and body to their characterization.

The drama was confronted with the difficult task of accepting the conventions of the stage, so much more stringent than those of fiction, and, in spite of them, setting forth human character with much of the loving

regard for the smaller denotements which unite to make the whole impression of personality. And doing this, the dramatists took unto themselves the advantage of this genre, for the gain is there, to offset the difficulty: the directness of the form, its enforced elimination of non-essentials, its pregnant presentation within confines of space and time the very condensation of which should produce an effect of heat and light. It is possible to be languid in movement in a psychological novel of value; to be languid in an acceptable play spells ruin. The older play was superior to the novel in objectivity, speed and salient emphasis, but lagged far behind it in truth and the power of revealing psychic states. But the new school, under the influence of Ibsen in Europe, and in England led by Shaw and those who have followed him,—Barker, Galsworthy, Bennett—have dared to put greater stress upon the things within, upon interests of the mind and spirit, and thus have brought a new dignity to the stage. They have borrowed from

fiction to enrich drama. That they have at times sacrificed too much in the way of plot, or have found trouble in subtleizing characterization to a point that obscures the type, may be readily granted. But the gain is more than compensatory. The drama can never do what is within the natural scope of fiction; it can never exhibit not only the dominant human qualities and characteristics but the differentiating peculiarities which separate soul from soul, differences which often do not appear upon the surface at all. But it certainly can reveal psychology with greater thoroughness than of old and refuse to maul it about under the exigency of plot or the restrictions of technic until what should be a human being becomes a lay figure. And in this matter of closer characterization, the American stage may now lay claim to progress. In the past, salient character portrayal was more frequent than good technic or value of idea. "Colonel Sellers" may not be a good play and its joints would no doubt creak painfully to-day, but Colonel Sellers

the personality, as I have already noted, is a genuine creation and a permanent figure. He stands for a type our civilization has produced and illustrates a phase of American life that art should seek to perpetuate. Davy Crockett is another such in earlier playmaking, and a few outstanding figures there are to mark this welcome instinct in our dramatists, early and late; welcome, because true, thoughtful character creation is the only basis for a stage that would be more than ephemeral.

I should venture the opinion that the contemporary American dramatist already exhibited in this respect a praiseworthy tendency, if it be not his strongest claim to attention. He is now reproducing with sympathetic insight a considerable range of characters, studied with something of the care suggested to the stage by fiction. The New York capitalist, the social idler, the western plainsman, the southern senator, the struggling city clerk, the country boy corrupted by town life, the gambler, the thief and the

harlot, the woman of ancestry and the woman with a past, the woman worker and the woman wanton, the American foreign-derived, in any one of his almost infinite variations: in short, the types that make up our seething population as in its fascinating readjustments it settles into social distinctions, are being portrayed on our stage by Thomas, Klein, Walter, Sheldon, Mackaye, Moody and many more, and their work has been sufficiently faithful to remind us of the service the stage can perform in this way; holding up to our gaze as in a mirror a national life so vast and diversified that the stay-at-home (if such there be in the United States) can hardly be expected to comprehend it without the aid of the arts.

If dramatic characterization must always lose somewhat of the Meissonier-like detail of the novel in the hands of a James, a De Morgan and a Bennett, there can be the commensurate gain of saliency and visualization. Molière's characters live alongside of Balzac's; the bridge between fiction and drama

is not impassable, given genius in the stage story teller and the literary habit in relation to stage literature in the reader.

We have gone far enough in the exploitation of native character in the theatre to stimulate the imagination to a picture of what may come, when with hand thoroughly trained and a clearer vision of his aim and opportunity, the dramatist shall do his work in that loving spirit which means human sympathy joined with the sternest self criticism and an insistence upon being true to his metier and satisfying his sternest critic—himself.

Every self-respecting dramatist, like any other artist, must write to please just one person—himself.

To say this, is to court trouble. "What," cry those insistent on the drama as a people's institution, "would you adopt a motto so aristocratic, removed and egoistic as this? To do so, is to strike at the very roots of dramatic art life."

As I mean the statement, not at all.

Rightly interpreted, the apparent antagonism between this and the democratic ideal disappears. Honesty is, root and branch, the life of all worthy creative endeavor; to do his best, to be himself, the artist simply must "draw the thing as he sees it," quite irrespective of whether another human being on the face of the earth sees it as does he. But with this necessity of being true to his vision goes, as a corollary, the obligation to be at the same time expressive of the human race; which the artist (dramatist, poet, painter,—it matters not,) will be, if he lives up to his high calling and be neither a freak nor a fraud, but truly a representative of mankind.

Here is where the moral obligation of art comes in; no writer can dodge it. He must in his work represent in such wise as to stand for humanity at large and offer the essentials of the human reaction to life. And in so far as he does this and just in proportion as he sums up in his own person the universal case, will he become one to reckon with. He will,

while looking into his heart to write, be at the same time looking into the general heart of his fellow beings. And so, what at first seemed egocentric and exclusive, will be seen to be sympathetic, altruistic, democratic. Be your best self, and inevitably, you become the best self of your kind; and yet, shall add something else to the expression of humanity in its universal traits: to wit, the individual interpretation which is the one precious thing which you or anyone can contribute to others; a contribution which depends, O how sternly and surely, upon absolute fidelity to the personal vision, dream, ideal. Every honest worker must apply to himself Mr. Galsworthy's weighty words: "He can only express himself sincerely by not considering the public at all."

And no artist of them all needs to embrace this creed more whole-heartedly than the dramatist, with a consideration of the audience so continually dinned into his ears. Let him consider the audience as to the ways and means of his message, the technic of his craft,

yes; but let the message itself be his own, delivered with the fervor that means conviction, without fear or favor. Though the hands be the hands of Esau, let the voice be that of Jacob.

It looks as if the American dramatist was awakening to this view of his work: the absolute necessity of honest vision. Mr. Klein has lately gone to London to reside, and the reason he gave for doing so was significant. "I believe that the trouble with the American playwright," he declared, "is that he lives too close to the conditions under which he works. He becomes, so to speak, the mouthpiece of the manager and the theatrical speculator." And he goes on to say that he wishes to get away "from the reverberations of Broadway." This desire to get a perspective on one's labor and shake off the tests of the mart, will grow among our playwrights as the more intelligent audience grows with them.

And in the relation of novel and play as twin forms of story making, each can learn

from the other, the play from fiction no less than fiction from the play. And in the point of patronage, the outlook for the latter seems increasingly bright.

X

IDEA IN DRAMA

PEOPLE who very properly cling to the notion that the stage is for amusement, become greatly alarmed at any suggestion that a play should contain an idea. They remind one of a horse who, safely guarded by blinders, shies instinctively when anything unwonted comes within his view. A mere hint, with the suitable mildness and timidity, that a play is none the worse for having behind the story a definite opinion about life, one that is vital and worth considering after the fable has perhaps quite faded out of memory, and you are hailed as an uncomfortable intellectualist whose development of forehead is but the outward mark of a disagreeable excess of mental activity. Such a one is an impractical and impertinent meddler in the theatre mart, where it must constantly be

remembered that the demands of the many rule, and there is no place for mistaken idealists.

The American stage, with its present wholesome eagerness for better things, is still in its nonage with respect to this matter. Dramatists are coming forward in increasing numbers who desire to express themselves more freely in terms of the play and to give it the dignity and beauty of a true narration of men and women as they are or hope to be on earth. Nor has the public shown itself averse from drama that has cared to comment upon some of the thousandfold consequences of human action. But we have not yet reached that place in the progress where dramatist, manager and theatre-goer come together openly, consciously, with the acknowledged purpose of collaborating in a form of entertainment which, as a matter of course, has affiliations with the thinking life of the community. This juncture occurs even now, but sporadically. The fact that they do in their work enter somewhat into this

thinking life is what gives significance to the work of Moody and Mackaye, Kennedy and Peabody, Walter, Sheldon and a few others. Some of these writers cherish it as an aim; others are more intermittent in their devotion; that they do it at all, that they and others of the younger workers who with each new season are revealed as candidates for a hearing, have the courage to make their labor something more than a stop gap for idlers, is the hopeful aspect of the present activity in our theatre life.

Many things irritate: the offence of ticket speculation, the inequalities of theatrical monopoly, the public disregard of the difference between personality and impersonation in the actor's art, the absence of sound and serious dramatic criticism and the persistent conservatism of managers in the recognition of the new. But all this can be endured and in time done away with, if only, and in increasing numbers, the American dramatist shall assert his right and wish to interpret life through his work. The expert in ex-

plaining the laws of the drama to one who is fain to master its technic, reduces the thing to a formula and a proposition, so-called. Back of the story he teaches, is the way of telling it and the thought which it propounds. In "Camille," for example, we have the following: A certain harlot honestly falls in love with a young man of social position. The young man clings to her, against the will of his father, who desires for him a suitable parti. What will the harlot do? What she does do, to wit, side with the father, break off the connection, and die, is what makes the appealing story which, in spite of the sentimental, lachrymosal treatment of this type of woman, still keeps the play a hardy perennial of the playhouse. And the idea about life beneath it all, what the thoughtful auditor takes away with him, is the query whether we have not been shallow and hasty in judgment upon this class of human beings. There is no pompous, philosophical color to an idea thus implied.

The insistence upon proposition in a play,

what is it but a concession that the backbone of any drama is idea? All human beings in their reaction to life, receive certain recurrent impressions about this and that which finally crystallize into beliefs, convictions, or if you prefer, prejudices. At least, these opinions stand for what they have learned from living, or think they have learned. Show them anything in a work of art which refers to this experience, or bears any relation whatsoever to it, and they will prick up their ears and give evidence of awakened interest. They are eager to compare notes in this way with another human being, the artist, to see if his conclusions tally with their own. There is a sense of companionship in this laying of heads together; and in the case of a play, whenever such an idea about life, personal yet broadly applicable because so human, is embodied therein, the play will have to be a very bad play not to arouse interest in a general audience. It hardly needs to say that if the idea does not dovetail with general experience, or is not hidden in a story

that is attractive and plausible, or is so clumsily manufactured that idea is smothered in story, or if there be lack of story, all these things will militate against success. But there is no contradiction of the principle that idea as such is fundamental. I for one sincerely believe that more dramas fail because of the want of a single, clear, dominant and consistent idea than for any other one reason,—save that of sheer inexpertness. Even when the hand is unsure and the artistic result sadly imperfect, if the arresting idea (I carefully dodge the terrible word, thesis) be present, it may serve to overcome all the defects. Mr. Browne's "Everywoman" is certainly no masterpiece either of literature or craftsmanship; indeed it may more fitly be described as a triumph of mediocrity in every particular of playmaking. Yet it appeals widely, and not alone to the heedless multitude, I have found, but to many not unintelligent auditors; because, with a too obvious definiteness, it embodies the idea of the eternal warfare between the flesh and

the spirit, as did its far superior prototype, "Everyman." Behind all the mawkish pseudo-ethics and shrewd pandering to popular taste in such a spectacle, there is an idea, however manhandled, and this carries it to success. "Everywoman" might be described as the right thing done in the wrong way.

The underlying unity thus secured—for nothing makes for unity in the drama like an idea clearly conceived and consistently clung to throughout the play—often gives a value to contemporary work that is open to criticism in many details. Miss Crothers's "Three of Us" is pleasantly remembered for its freshness and honesty. Yet the scene in the room at midnight when a woman puts herself in a man's power to blast her reputation is so old and stale as to make the sophisticated smile. It is the enjoyable truth of the type, the idea of woman's mission in holding together the family under untoward circumstances, with its exhibition of resourceful courage and independence, which gives this unpretentious drama its note of the modern.

The author had an idea, she had a definite sympathetically conceived character such as our day has evolved or is evolving; the rest did not so much matter. Similarly, in Eleanor Gates's "The Poor Little Rich Girl," with its capital chance for fantastic comedy, the underlying suggestion behind of a danger in the conventional upbringing, interweaves with the imaginative fun to add *raison d'être* to its existence, and make a thoughtful memory after the play is over. Similarly, I believe that in Margaret Mayo's pleasantly romantic comedy, "Polly of the Circus," there is a definite social criticism that gives it backbone.

Mr. Winchell Smith is an expert young playwright with a pleasing Americanism about him, and gives assurance of stronger work to come. His "The Only Son" failed; why? It was an interesting, clean-cut and technically well-made play. In a drama so genuine and legitimate in its appeal, there must have been something wrong with the idea or handling of the idea, unless we ac-

cept the explanation that certain untoward conditions surrounded the production of the piece, quite aside from its merits or demerits. Was it not a certain unreality or false note in the drawing of the mother, who, as erring wife restored to the husband through the mediation of the son, does not quite ring true? The idea of a son standing by a mother when she most needs it is so fine, heart-warming and true, that if it fails in embodiment, a reason must be found in the violation of the truth in the relations of the three central characters. In brief, the idea was blurred, weakened in credibility by a slip in psychology. Mr. Jules Goodman's "Mother"—the mother motive has been amply used by the young school—gave much satisfaction to many auditors, and its purpose, to exhibit the self sacrificing devotion of woman in the family, deserves nothing but approval. But when, in order to show this type, the mother is made to ignore moral distinctions, she is sentimentalized out of credence and so cheapened in her presumed

heroism as to make the tears she freely draws a credit to the heart perhaps, but hardly to the intelligence. Again, a good idea is injured by the failure to base it on thoroughly sound psychology. It will not do at all to say when confronted with such cases, that women are "kittle cattle," and human nature in general does not show the consistency we demand. It is a question of convincing, and of securing the sympathy which is founded upon that conviction; if the character lacks consistency, it may be life, but it is not good drama. A sharp distinction may be drawn between all such portrayal of motherhood and that implied in Tennyson's "Rizpah," or Kipling's "Mother o' Mine." Even a mother's all-for-love must have a recognition of the stern laws of life. Love conquers all—but common sense.

Like all other words used by man, *idea* has connotations that make it misleading. To talk of idea in drama may imply a sort of hard intellectualization of an art form intended for the democratic delight of the

multitude; or may even suggest metaphysics in place of amusement. Nothing is further from my intention in its use here. Neither conscious didacticism, nor heady argument nor preachment in disguise lies in the thought that the play can be clarified, strengthened and made lasting on the mental side by a centralizing view of life; even as on the esthetic side it can be conserved by style which preserves and the architecture which gives solid foundation. That American critic who is still perhaps our greatest and who occupies the position because he humanized thinking and never lost his sense of values nor his sense of humor, James Russell Lowell, with Shakspeare as his quarry, once wrote these words, that come aptly to mind here: "But the primary *object* of a tragedy is not to inculcate a formal moral. Representing life, it teaches, like life, by indirection, by those nods and winks that are thrown away on us blind horses in such profusion. We may learn, to be sure, plenty of lessons from Shakspeare.

. . . but I do not believe that he wrote his plays with any such didactic purpose. He knew human nature too well not to know that one thorn of experience is worth a whole wilderness of warning; that where one man shapes his life by precept and example, there are a thousand who have it shaped for them by impulse and circumstances. He did not mean his great tragedies for scarecrows, as if the nailing of one hawk to the barn door would prevent the next from coming down souse into the hen yard. No, it is not the poor bleaching victim hung up to moult its draggled feathers in the rain that he wishes to show us. He loves the hawk nature as well as the hen nature; and if he is unequalled in anything, it is in that sunny breadth of view, that impregnability of reason, that looks down on all ranks and conditions of men, with the equal eye of the pure artist."

And the modern dramatist, he who strives to-day to picture life in terms of modern society may (comparing small things with

great) achieve the same result: remain the artist in his unpartizan joy in studying mankind as it is, and yet, by indirection, teach and preach; necessary to which, now as always, is an idea underneath the exhibition of life, and a conviction concerning the ways of God with men. Success in dramatic writing that is to be more than ephemeral and negligible, must rest upon such a foundation as this; along with the indispensable skill in handling the form there must be that sympathy in life which flowers in some proof that the playmaker has really been living, and therefore has something to say about the great, confusing, inspiring life play from which he makes his own little drama.

Important as the immediate popular response to a drama may be, the critic must be a little chary of pronouncing failure or success upon this ground alone. What indeed is meant by "success" in the drama and what sort of play in America to-day secures it? The obvious reply is to say that a play

that, within a brief time, attracts a sufficient number of persons to meet expenses and leave a margin of reasonable profit is successful. But the conditions of this commercial success are not so plain as might appear. Within a week of the New York première of the piece its fate is, as a rule, decided. The assumption in such a case is that the audience which thus makes or mars a drama is typical as representing audiences everywhere in the country; along with another assumption: that the drama has been properly staged, rehearsed and acted, and that the situation in the theatre world at the time of its production is sufficiently normal to give the play a fair chance to declare its merit. Yet none or not all of these conditions may be present. The drama may be miscast and its meaning so obscured as materially to affect its welfare. This happens so commonly as to be very familiar. Or, an excellent drama may deal with an aspect of life or a phase of character which happens to have been exploited already in New York

and so comes as a repetition; yet contains an appeal which would make it welcome throughout the country when it goes on its travels.

Or once more, the stage management of the new play might be so stupidly unaware of its intention as largely to hide what it really is and wishes to do. We know how much color scheme and stage grouping and wrong emphasis are to be reckoned with in the life of a play; and veteran theatre-goers have seen disaster wait upon their neglect.

Also it is quite possible that there may be other local reasons why the drama in question should not flourish at the moment of its appearance. Financial gloom, exceptional weather, the hot season, counter attractions like Christmas, and half a dozen like interferences can be at once conjured up; all of them contributory to, if not decisive of, the drama's fate. Then, too, the play when it is first seen may be of substantial merit, which is lost sight of in easily remedied mistakes, the malaises that even

the experienced dramatist finds himself subject to. By alterations rapidly made during the early life of the play the drama can be made right, but more than a few nights, or a week's time, may be needed to discover what is wrong. Often, a play failing in the metropolis, has been rectified later when it has been done in the provinces and so brought to a satisfactory and successful state. Mr. Walter's "Fine Feathers" is an illustration of the statement.

It is also true that there is now a particular kind of audience awaiting a certain kind of play, yet the audience does not receive the news in time to rally to its support. Mr. Kenyon's "Kindling" would not have survived its very cool first reception in New York City had it not been for the vigorous concerted efforts of a few well-wishers of sound drama, critics and literary folk, who managed to tide that fine play over its unsuccessful beginning. The remarkably cordial reception awarded to Brieux's vital though sombre drama "Dam-

aged Goods," in the spring of 1913, in New York, is an apt illustration of the statement that special audiences for the sort of play that does not appeal to the conventional flock of theatre-goers are already in existence, so that it should be part of a wise managerial policy to find and feed them.

And this suggests the larger thought that the assumption that in a given New York theatre on a certain day the audience fairly represents the reception the drama is likely to get anywhere and under all conditions, is unwarranted. The first night metropolitan audience may be critical, it is certainly more blasé than those who are to follow, and those following nights are crucial in the play's career. The theatre auditors are then made up of a shifting number of idlers, visitors from all parts of the land and representing all degrees and grades of intelligence, culture and physical condition,—this last a homely but important consideration. The advocates of the doctrine of the drama's democracy will promptly remind me that

this mixed nature of the audience is just the desideratum for the kind of judgment we should desire; but, to my mind, this is pushing the *vox populi* doctrine to an absurd extreme. The audience under such conditions is far from an ideal one to settle the fate of a piece of dramatic literature, or that of a good stage story. It should not be allowed to pass final sentence upon a work of art in the theatre. Largely, it consists of ignorant itinerants who are no more New Yorkers than they are Athenians. It is well known that there is now a distinct reaction against the tyranny of a New York verdict of this unsatisfactory sort, and it is coming to be realized that a dozen large cities in the United States may properly be heard from before it is blandly decided that a play is good or bad. The American drama as it heroically struggles into excellence is at present suffering from what might be called the department store methods of production that obtain with some of the most influential managers. There is a tendency to produce plays

by wholesale, so that the theatrical business becomes a sort of gambling game. The manager puts a large number of dramas before the public, dramas supposedly of different types, in order that one or two out of a dozen may secure a hearing and recoup the producer for his remaining failures. The same method has become very familiar to us in the field of popular fiction. The result is, that the individual play is not given the attention it calls for to bring out its particular excellencies (which it may be assumed it has, else why produce it at all?) but is fairly slung on the stage to fill a gap, or prevent a house from going dark; and as hastily taken off before the test has been given it. And all the blame of this absurd, uneconomic waste of promising material is promptly put upon the drama itself, instead of where it belongs: squarely upon the managers themselves.

How utterly unfair, not to say ridiculous, in the light of these facts and notwithstanding them, that a drama should within a week

be pronounced a failure and go to the country (if it have courage to try further) with that stigma upon it, under the necessity of living down an evil reputation, perhaps entirely undeserved!

In view of all this, the critic in the seats or elsewhere should be slow to decide that because a play has been withdrawn it is necessarily bad drama; or be sure that under fairer and more enlightened conditions the present failure may not prove the future success. And it may be set down as reasonable in casting the drama's horoscope in this country, to expect plays to succeed in both the commercial and critical sense in proportion as they boldly embody in their work a criticism of life.

Although the phrase as applied to poetry by Matthew Arnold may be unsatisfactory,—who, for that matter, has defined poetry for general critical acceptance?—it is happily descriptive of what a play should contain as a centre from which to radiate as a living organism. A play without an opinion

of life beneath it is a flabby invertebrate. The "criticism" is not a matter of the intellect primarily nor is formal philosophy involved; it is rather the sum total of what the writer has learned in the homely business of daily living. But just as truly—all the more truly for this reason, indeed—it represents his faith, his conviction, his hope, fear, guess, aspiration, mirrored in the aspect of life he is depicting. Arnold used the word "criticism" in this sense; and retaining that meaning and applying it to drama, it may be said that the rational pleasure in any piece of work that gets a hearing in the playhouse is in ratio to the idea it contains, the criticism of life it offers, the oneness of purpose in steadily revealing it, and the skill with which this is made manifest. And it is my opinion that a close watch upon the drama now being written by the dramatists recently arrived or arriving, will show that nothing distinguishes them more clearly from their elders than the way in which, with firmer technic and a more positive

native note, they are gaining in vitality and verity through a reliance upon that interest in life which is the common instinct and inheritance of all who live.

XI

THE THEATRE AND EDUCATION

EDUCATION, broadly viewed, might be defined as such drawing out of the powers of a human being as shall bring him into harmony with his environment. To realize one's self in relation to the world, both within and without, that, I take it, is education stripped of all its frills and furbelows. Anything that reveals one's potentialities, and then teaches one to use those powers with a clear perception of what life is, is educative in the deepest sense.

The self-conscious life of a human being is two-thirds emotional; the remark is Matthew Arnold's, but observation corroborates the statement. It is not true because he said it—he said it because it is true. Hence, any medium of education which takes advantage of this psychic fact, becomes at

once more influential as an educational means.

The theatre is such a means; it is a place where a large number of persons may see a piece of life, have it brought home to them directly, warmly, in terms of the emotions, rather than by head-work; so that the great lessons of life are instilled as naturally as in that first school (prototype of all the rest), when the child at the mother's knee learns the deep lessons of living.

The theatre indeed would have some educational worth if it taught only the more external things, like speech and deportment. The Germans show their sense of the usefulness of the stage in the matter of offering a model of speech by the word *bühnensprache*; they concede that proper pronunciation, intonation, general elegance of utterance may thus be instilled.

In the playhouse, the auditorium darkened to shut out the workaday world, we watch the acts, think the thoughts, and respond sympathetically to the feelings of men

and women undergoing experiences like our own, or coveted by us; we are impressionable children drinking in the wonder of the world. And think for a moment of the vastness of such a people's school! By a most conservative estimate, millions of folk weekly attend theatres in this country, exclusive of motion picture shows. Surely, here is a great natural school, unsurpassed in power and opportunity!

Nor should it be overlooked that the fact that these lessons come in the guise of amusement, so far from making them less educative, actually adds to their power, since mankind, for the very reason that it is unaware of being influenced, is all the more plastic to impressions, more subject to this mighty influence.

Another element in the power of the theatre lies in its being a social experience and expression. The lesson is the more potent in that it is common to a large number of human beings together; the now familiar mob psychology being present to give the

individual emotions overtones, so to say, to fortify the strength of the impression and multiply its effects.

The first point, therefore, in any fruitful consideration of the matter, is to realize this impressive influence of the playhouse in the common social life; and next, to separate such potential power for good from all its abuse, while frankly conceding such mishandling of the theatre; and finally to ask ourselves if anything can be done about it. Is this a practical matter of some import to good citizens everywhere? Is the theatre at present often a menace to society, and can it become one of the most formidable weapons in the right hands for the betterment of the state? And if so, have educators a vital relation to the matter, and what can they and should they do in the premises?

Public opinion has sufficiently developed to make such questions no longer erratic, as a few years ago they might have been considered. As we have seen, so much is now happening in the way of recognition of

the theatre, that even the callous-minded must feel the push of the general interest.

On all sides, nowadays, the better elements of the community are tardily awakening to the significance of this social factor, the theatre. The old-time narrow and foolish conception of it as a gateway to hell is rapidly passing into the limbo of dead ideas. Here and there still, to be sure, the notion that there is something intrinsically evil in the playhouse makes itself heard; but emphatically it does not represent the best thought of the time. The typical broad-minded person, whom one likes to call modern, is coming to feel that the theatre, because of its direct influence upon the masses, is very much his business, especially in its relation to the young and to women. The majority of all theatre-goers are young, and if statistics recently gathered in New York can be trusted, eighty per cent. of them are women—the future mothers and home-makers of the land.

This same modern person is aware (else were he *not* modern) that the future of the

state, its welfare in all that makes for civilization, lies with the children, with the young who swarm in its houses and seek amusement in its streets, or over its wide spaces of countryside. And he knows that if we pay no attention to the sort of pabulum we offer this vast throng which, millions strong a week, turns for pleasure, rest, refreshment and romance, to the playhouse, then much that is so offered will be not helpful but vicious, undoing all the good effects of home, school, library and church; so that to see that our playhouses do good rather than harm is beginning to be recognized as a civic and social aim quite as practical and important as the question of the referendum or recall; perhaps even more important. Think of the purblind indifference to the social welfare implied in the license granted for so many years to the managers of theatrical companies in the matter of the billboards which so often flaunt pictorial and verbal indecency in the face of youth as it troops to and from school. We pay great

sums to maintain the schools, and then, by suffering those lewd advertisements, largely nullify the educational work to which so much time, labor and money are dedicated. Highly uneconomic, this, and, in truth, an ironic spectacle!

The best element in the community cannot long set aside as not its business that sequence of social cause and effect which begins with the working girl's unlivable wage, has for its middle term the sensualistic and provocative show, is followed by the dance hall, private drinking room and brothel; and has for end of this "strange eventful history," that which is far more terrible than the Shakspearean "mere oblivion." I know of no more astonishing spectacle in our boasted latter-day life than the attitude which up to the last years obtained toward the theatre; the failure to see its significance, its menace, its glorious possibilities for popular instruction,—not in the dry pedagogic sense, but in the genial, liberal meaning of the word: instruction in the

facts of human psychology and the mysteries of the human spirit, so that we may be fortified by truth and uplifted by ideals; instruction, too, through that enlargement of the whole nature which comes from a sympathetic comprehension of the big world lying beyond the petty boundaries of individual experience.

And now to name certain obvious duties. In the first place, not as teachers, but merely as human beings, we can insist on an intelligent use of the theatre for ourselves and suggest it to others. For ourselves, by choosing entertainment that has some artistic value, some stimulation as literature, some significance as an interpretation of life; ascertaining this through the best criticism, by a preparatory reading of plays (now so widely published), and by class or club study of dramatic literature. Then we shall be ready for the good drama when it comes, and quick to separate it from the negligible or worse.

Then as parents, or those having in any

way the care and direction of the young, we can, both by precept and example, guide them in their choice, using persuasion rather than compulsion; nor hesitating for a moment to point out the world-wide difference between a serious thought-compelling drama like "The Easiest Way," or a beautiful drama of dream and ideal like "The Blue Bird," on the one hand, and, on the other, the sensualities and sillinesses of comic opera and the too frequent vulgarities of vaudeville. Too many parents have been in the habit of exhibiting the same carelessness as to the theatre-going of their young, that they have shown in the matter of their reading. In all our larger cities, the spectacle is common of matinée box parties made up of young folk from the best homes, to witness some vulgar travesty of life instead of a real play, or placidly to imbibe the morals of the gutter from knock-about comedians whose only natural home is the circus ring or the bagnio.

The writer (if he may be allowed per-

sonal testimony) has for years been closely in touch with the Drama Club of his own university, which has allowed him to have a hand in the choice of plays and he has tried to show all concerned the service such an organization can perform, not only to the actors themselves, but to the college community, and to the local town public, if only the representative drama of the world be performed. Far better good plays earnestly and intelligently rendered—albeit lacking the professional touch—rather than meaningless plays in the hands of professional masters. And I take pride in saying that for ten years nothing but drama of worth and significance has been presented; including the works of Shakspeare, Beaumont and Fletcher, Ibsen, Shaw, Holberg, Coppée, Jones and Pinero.

And coming more explicitly to teachers, it is my sincere conviction that the school, as well as college, can do much in teaching their students about the theatre; and in several ways. First, in helping and encouraging the Drama Club in educational institutions,

making it an integral part of the work to receive regular college credit, and a dignified phase of English study, fostered and especially furthered by the English department.

Again, by offering classes for the purpose of teaching the literary history of the drama, so that the pupil may learn to respect the stage in that way; classes in the laws of its technic, so that he may respect the play as a work of art; and classes in its social history, so that the student learning, for instance, that an enlightened land like France appropriates hundreds of thousands of dollars annually to maintain four theatres, will have it borne in on his consciousness that in the opinion of mankind the playhouse bears an important relation to the state.

And once more, by practical guidance in theatre attendance. There is no reason in the world why the teacher should not offer continual advice on the relative values of current drama, with the practical result of influencing the theatre habit of students. The use and abuse of the playhouse can in this in-

formal manner, as friend to friends, be plainly indicated.

In these three ways, at least, both school and college can throw the weight of their influence toward a better comprehension of the theatre. It may be added that we shall soon have simple, sensible text-books on this subject, even as we now have text-books on chemistry, history or law. The recent admirable work on "Playmaking" by William Archer, the earlier book on "The Theory of the Theatre," by Clayton Hamilton, Mr. Price's elaborate study, "Analysis of Play Construction," the sterling books by Brander Matthews and later to appear, that on "The Play of To-day," by Miss Hunt, and "The Civic Theatre," by Mr. Mackaye, are but forerunners of more rudimentary manuals which will help the pupil to appreciate the play and make it naturally a part of his studies. Indeed, a manual has already appeared under the direction of the Drama League of America, aimed to offer a course of dramatic study for the High School.

The recent book entitled "Educational Dramatics," designed for teachers, club leaders and amateurs, is also an indication of the change. It will be realized more and more that it is part of the business of teachers to prepare the intelligent theatre-goer and amateur critic of the future. So much they should do, while awaiting the day of general recognition of the theatre by municipality and state; or better, its general recognition by society. The educational significance of the pageant movement here and abroad need only to be referred to, in order that the reader may realize what a promising and as yet little used factor is here. History visualized, emotionalized, made dramatic, what a power for popular instruction, when once it is widely utilized! The pioneer work in this field done in the United States by a practical worker like Mr. Mackaye will be appreciated the more as time passes. The connection of childhood, too, with the movement in the playground work—the reopening of the Children's Educational Theatre in New

York, and the Shakspeare Festival of public school children in Chicago, already referred to, are pertinent examples—suggest the rich possibilities of utilizing the play in pageant and playhouse work. In witnessing the California Mission Play, I felt that that state would be wise to present tickets of admission to such a play to all its school children, as an induction into good citizenship.

And all this can be accomplished better than ever before, because we have the encouragement of a quickened interest and a new birth of the literary drama, beyond all cavil the most marked tendency in modern literature during the past ten years. We are sustained by a generally aroused perception that a power so potent for good has been largely wasted,—or worse, allowed to run into channels inimical to national health.

Such a power the theatre is, for good or evil; until now, often evil in effect and influence, and it is for the people, realizing this at last, to control it for the noble purpose of making it the beneficent institution

which it became in its highest estate in Greece, and again in the Elizabethan period of England, an influence also potent and flourishing in the elder days of Spain; and in several European lands just as truly powerful in the new efflorescence to-day. It has been, and always can be, the repository of the noblest literature, a temple of inspirational life, a school for all the virtues. And because it can be, no consideration of private business should prevent us as individuals, working in groups or through our chosen representatives, from insisting that this mighty instrument of good shall perform the service delegated to it when it was born in the bosom of Mother Church and for centuries thereafter did not forget that its reason-for-being (back of its function of amusement) was to minister to the highest good of toil-worn mankind. The better estate of the theatre beginning to take shape before our eyes, is no Utopian dream, but a return to conditions which have existed in the past, with all the advantages accruing to it—and

they are many—from the mechanical and other boons of modern development in the playhouse.

No longer can we undervalue that ministry, and refuse to do justice to the great moments afforded us by the theatre; as where, in "Lear," the broken king, distraught and dazed, cries out to his one faithful daughter, as a sense of her identity breaks through his cloudy mind:

" Do not laugh at me;
For, as I am a man, I think this lady
To be my child, Cordelia."

Or when, in Goethe's "Faust," Marguerite in prison, dazed by her dream of disaster, wails forth those words so expressive of her sense of life's mystery:

" Yet everything that brought me here
Was O so good, and O so dear!"

Or when Beatrice Cenci in Shelley's play, about to die on the scaffold, talks with her mother in that vein of elemental simplicity natural to a noble character in a great moment of fate:

“ Here, mother,
Tie my girdle for me, and bind up this hair
In any simple knot; ay, that does well.
And yours I see is coming down. How often
Have we done this for one another; now
We shall not do it any more. My Lord,
We are quite ready. Well—’tis very well.”

Or when, again, the drain-man in Kennedy’s “Servant in the House,” replies to the weak moan of the clergyman, who declares that he is nothing, “less than nothing in all this living world”:

“By God, but I call *myself* summat! I’m the drain-man, that’s wot *I* am,” a splendid affirmation of the dignity of labor.

Or once more, when Peter Pan in Barrie’s ever-delightful play, steps forward to the footlights and makes that blithe appeal to the faith of us all in the Never, Never Land, and the instant response comes, often borne upon the sweet treble of children’s voices; an assertion of the might of the imagination in this world, turning it from mud color to golden, and forming, indeed, the most necessary aid to living in the full category of heaven’s gifts to man.

These, and such as these, are great moments in the theatre and the men who make them possible for us are not surpassed, it seems to me, in the service they perform for the community and the state. These are the moments of our associated life when civilization appears more than a name; and confronted by them, knowing that the playhouse can do us this service, the exquisite absurdity of calling such experience a "show" and nothing more, becomes, it is to be hoped, sufficiently apparent.

O that gift of the imagination! It is well that Mr. Faversham gives it the place of honor in his profession in recent addresses before university audiences; that Richard Mansfield made an impassioned plea for poetry in the playhouse. For it is the faculty of man whereby he reaches and recognizes the higher truth of life: the truth that is in dreams, aspirations, ideals. After all, life for every one of us is far more a state of mind than an external fact. No apology is offered for the tone of frank didacticism in

which the argument is presented. It is preferable, let us hope, to the note of light cynicism with which the subject is frequently treated; it is better to be "elementary" than to obscure and distort a good cause by an attempt at flippant and shallow cleverness.

At present, the theatre is very much like life itself; the two plays "Everyman" and "Everywoman" (perhaps better named "Anyman" and "Anywoman") offer titular symbols of its scope in that they faithfully reproduce the light and shade, the good and evil, of the human case. Any such representation which is broad and fair, which tells the truth concerning man in both his high and low estate, is salutary, if only the proper emphasis be thrown upon the respective parts of the picture. Therefore, while making a stern demand upon the theatre as to its influence, we must allow it a reasonable liberty, for fear that otherwise we may choke its strength, and cramp its service. In demanding morality, we must interpret the word in a generous way, not forgetting Bernard

Shaw's piercing remark, to the effect that people are always "confusing the shock of surprise with the genuine ethical shock."

In other words, to a certain type of mind, set in habit and adjusted to conventions which are as the laws of the Medes and Persians, anything out of the ordinary and contrary to custom, is a matter of offence. We cannot afford to let that sort of man-milliner dictate in this matter of the play-house. He is as dangerous to its welfare as is the common commercial manager. Apply the principle to all art, and Shakspeare, Dante, Homer, Michael Angelo, Goethe, Rodin, Heine, Mark Twain, Beethoven, Wagner, Whitman, and as many more, would be eliminated at one fell swoop, for their kind always sees life too broadly and feels it too deeply not to speak out plain, albeit cleanly, and to show all of it that is necessary to reveal its meaning and message. Life is not a pretty child to be exhibited only in esthetic clothes and cosseted because so frail; but rather, a grown-up sturdy creature,

rough at times, even rank in certain moods, but nevertheless hale, sweet-breathed, clear-eyed, having something in its sweeping gesture and show of virile power which suggests a great ancestry and a greater destiny.

And above all, must we hang on to the idea that the theatre is our creature, the public's; we made it, we keep it alive, we can control it, if so we will. Let us cherish a sensible ideal to give the people good drama at a people's price, rather than at a price that is prohibitive for three-fourths of all potential playgoers. And let us train ourselves to understand it, to patronize it aright, to relate it to school and society, in place of an aloof position of indifference and hyper-criticism, with its blame heavy on manager or actor. In a word, let us seek to furnish an intelligent audience and thus make certain a legitimate drama and a theatre so enlightened that it shall be a national asset. Of the four types who shape the fortune of the theatre, the playwright, actor, manager (the actor-manager takes on the functions of

the other two, doubling his privilege and responsibility) and theatre-goer, the latter has been too little emphasized. In reality, he is the keystone of the arch. The others are but creatures of his pleasure; imperatively, imperiously, does he beckon and they follow. The right kind of an audience means worthy drama. It is well for the theatre-goer to become conscious of this power, that a sense of obligation may be born in him and, in association with others, he may take his part in the quartet that co-operatively control the fate of this most influential of public amusements. Far beyond the confines of school and college, wherever men think and feel indeed, should there be an education in what the theatre means and stands for; in its use as distinguished from its abuse; in its high possibilities, its frequent debasement, its occasional relation to art and letters, a relation which might be made constant. And if the theatre-goer do his share in this *eclaircissement*, it is perfectly safe to say that actor, playwright, and manager will do theirs; they

being, after all, but servants of the great public.

Is there under heaven a more satiric incongruity than the sight of a person bewailing the lack of excellent plays when, by his refusal to attend one at its coming, or his ignorance of the presence of one at his door, he is doing all in his power to perpetuate the very condition of things he bemoans? Surely, before that spectacle, one can hear Meredith's "laughter of gods in the background."

THE WORD AFTER

IT should appear from the foregoing pages that pessimism was never more out of place in thinking of the drama than at present. The thoughtful observer can frankly confess that, so far as we have gone, the American product and performance do not challenge the British work of such dramatists as Pinero, Jones, Wilde, Barrie, Shaw, Synge, Yeats, Galsworthy, Zangwill and half a dozen more. Nor is he unaware of the fact that a superfluity of the meretricious is still being vended under the practical pressure which is the result of the overbuilding of playhouses and the speculative methods of the day; with the inevitable sequel of the speedy demise of the great majority of dramas now manufactured.

But he meets these irrefutable statements cheerfully and with head up, because he is

aware that in America there has been until lately less encouragement to our literary makers to turn to drama as a serious form of expression than there has been in the old country. Also he consoles himself with the reflection that in any year of grace since drama has been produced in English-speaking lands, by far the largest percentage of plays has steadily perished; and that the real test, and only fair one, is to ask and answer the question: how does this year compare with the year preceding? With a lustrum ago, a decade, a quarter century? And he knows that the higher interest is astir, as never before; that more intelligent activity has begun; that the well-wishers of the theatre are everywhere fast consolidating for effective work of many kinds. Seeing this, he can afford to be patient when the veteran remark is vented as to the hopelessness of things dramatic, accompanied by the equally long-lived comparison with those hypothetical good times of the sacred past. For he considers not only our recent creditable prog-

ress in playmaking, but human nature as well; and so accepts, with a tolerant smile, the indifference which assumes that state of mind to be a merit, and the ignorance that masks as omniscience.



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